

# Arts & Entertainment

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The Houston Post  
Sun., October 18, 1987

# NIXON IN CHINA

## New opera is certain to stir up controversy

By CARL CUNNINGHAM  
Post Music Editor

Just as Richard Nixon and Mao Tse-tung joined hands 15 years ago, in an epic challenge to the maxim that East and West can never meet, history jostles with theatrical fantasy in Houston Grand Opera's unprecedented retelling of that meeting Thursday at Wortham Center.

The world premiere of composer John Adams' two-act opera *Nixon in China* has captured international attention and will probably spark public controversy, as few opera premieres have done.

The opera is the brainchild of the revolutionary 30-year-old di-

rector Peter Sellars, whose controversial modern stagings of all manner of dramatic forms have set the theater world on its eyebrows throughout the 1980s.

Musically, *Nixon in China* will put the spotlight on 40-year-old composer John Adams, whose lusciously colored, neo-romantic orchestral music grew out of the minimalist tradition to pay its respects to the 19th-century styles of Wagner and Sibelius.

And the production will be a major public introduction to Minnesota poet Alice Goodman, whose verse libretto for the opera has been widely praised for its beautiful, thoughtful metaphors, so nicely akin to oriental tradition.

But is *Nixon in China* fact or fiction, sincere or satirical? Like all historical operas, it begs the issue of slavish obedience to fact, fearing that would keep operagoers chained to their seats long past bedtime — or put them to sleep long before that time!

So *Nixon in China* pads the lining of diplomacy with heroes and villains, deflating egos, ennobling humility and pointing up the quirks and foibles of human behavior.

Some of its portrayals are sufficiently pointed that Houston Grand Opera saw fit to protect *Nixon in China's* composer, author and three co-commissioning opera producers with an "errors and omissions" insurance policy, covering material that may not be in the public domain or could be considered defamatory.

Lest we forget, four of the six players in this fast and loose tale



Set from the opera, *Nixon in China*.

of world politics are still alive. This situation is a bit more touchy than the censorship Verdi faced in *A Masked Ball* for his graphic portrayal of the century-old assassination of a Swedish king.

So HGO general director David Gockley is hedging his bets that Madame Mao, one of the now-discredited Gang of Four, won't file suit from her Chinese prison cell for being portrayed as a shrill,

vindictive Mozarcean Queen of the Night who can match street language with the best of them.

Will Henry Kissinger rise up in awful fury from the hallowed halls of academia, to say that all the world's *not a stage*? Will he sue these poor players for frocking his diplomatic image in the costume of a vicious, lustful Chinese landlord, given to whipping poor, defenseless slave girls into senseless

submission?

As they say in the old radio shows, wait until the next episode folks, because the latest version of *Nixon in China's* much-revised scenario says that's what's going onstage when the curtain goes up.

The opera's first act takes us from the Peking Airport and official greetings between Nixon (baritone James Maddalena),

Kissinger (bass Thomas Hammons) and Chinese premier Chou En-lai (tenor Sanford Sylvan) to the book-cluttered library of Chairman Mao (tenor John Duykers), where Chou and the philosophic Mao engage in cryptic, suspicion-tinged verbal fencing matches with their U.S. counterparts.

The act ends with a big public banquet scene, brought to its cli-

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max by two long arias in which tenor Chou heroically toasts the Chinese people's enduring heritage and quest for peace, while baritone Nixon is absorbed with the instant worldwide publicity the event has garnered through satellite TV transmission.

Personality portraits start to prink playfully in Act Two, as Pat Nixon (lyric soprano Carolann Page) goes like any suburban housewife on a tour of a people's commune, a pig farm, the Summer Palace and the Ming Tombs.

But the dramatic knife of *Nixon in China* is really unsheathed in the climactic second scene of Act Two, which employs the time-honored play-within-a-play device with cutting intent. It is in this scene's pantomime ballet that avant-garde choreographer Mark Morris joins his startling talents to those of Sellars, Adams and Goodman.

Symbolically, the operatic villains square off, as Madame Mao (soprano Trudey Ellen Craney) stages one of her revolutionary ballets, *The Red Detachment of Women*. Suddenly, the horrified Nixons see a poor chained girl being whipped to death onstage by a cruel imperial landlord who bears an unmistakable resemblance to Kissinger.

They jump over the footlights to rescue her, get mixed up in the action of the ballet and are drenched in a staged rainstorm that falls over the tropical-island set of Madame Mao's vicious little stage piece.

Originally, the satire was to deepen in the problematic, much-revised closing scene of the opera, where the exhausted, somewhat drunken hosts and guests were to have let down their hair in a noisy, informal dinner-dance.

But much to director Sellars' surprise, his two cohorts wove the musical and verbal counterpoint of this scene into a much deeper, soul-searching probe of the private lives of these five aging, world-famed figures. (Kissinger is excused to go to the bathroom toward the outset of the scene, and sings no more in the

See *Nixon in China* page 11F

# Around town

## Ticket code:

A=At the door; D=Downtown Ticket Center, tunnel level of the 1100 Main Building, 222-5100; H=Houston Ticket Center, Wortham Theater Center, Smith at Texas, 227-ARTS; J=Joske's stores; R=Rocketfeller's, 861-9365; RT=Rainbow Ticketmaster, 977-3333; S>Showbox, park level of Tranquillity Park, 227-9292; T=Ticketron, 526-1709.

**AROUND TOWN** listings are due at noon the Monday before publication date. Mail (no phone calls) to Arts & Entertainment Listings, The Houston Post, P.O. Box 4747, Houston TX 77210-4747, and designate which category (classical music, pop music, theater, etc.) on the envelope. Black-and-white photos are welcomed; they cannot be returned. Because of space limitations, not all submitted listings can be printed.

Clubs and restaurants should include names, times and dates of performances along with club name, address and phone number.

## Film

The following films open this week and unless otherwise noted are screened at multiple theaters. For complete film listings, see Friday's Weekend section.

**I've Heard the Mermaids Singing** — Whimsical comedy-drama from Canada, about a klutzy part-time secretary who's drawn into the trendy art community of Toronto. Opens Friday at the River Oaks 3.

**Joan of Arc at the Stake** — Newly restored version of Roberto Rossellini's 1954 film, based on Arthur Honegger's oratorio and starring Ingrid Bergman in the title role. Presented in conjunction with *A Tribute to Roberto Rossellini* film retrospective. Houston premiere: 8 p.m. Friday at Bel Air Theatre.

**Nightflyers** — Sci-fi thriller, set aboard a spacecraft where the human crew members are stalked by an unseen malevolent force. Catherine Mary Stewart stars. Opens Friday.

**No Man's Land** — Thriller about a rookie cop on the trail of a homicidal car thief. Charlie Sheen, D.B. Sweeney and Randy Quaid star. Opens Friday.

**The Offspring** — Horror drama about a reporter who uncovers voodoo priests, psychopaths and gruesome murders in a Tennessee town. Vincent Price and Clu Gulager head the cast. Opens Friday.

**Prince of Darkness** — Thriller from John Carpenter (*Halloween*), about a priest (Donald Pleasence) who enlists graduate science students to prevent the return of Satan. Opens Friday.

**Suspect** — A public defender (Cher) jeopardizes her career when she accepts information crucial to her client's defense from a juror (Dennis Quaid) in this mystery-thriller. Opens Friday.

**Museum of Fine Arts, Houston** — *Before Hollywood*: Program 6, Love and Misadventure, 7 Sun. *Asian-American Film Festival*: Chester Franklin's *Toll of the Sea* with Anna May Wong, 8 Fri; Christine Choy's *Permanent Wave* and Tokio Aguiluz's *Father Balweg, Rebel Priest*, 2 Sat; Ho Quang Minh's *Karma*, 8 Sat. 1001 Bissonnet, 526-1361.

**Rice University Media Center** — *Films That Got Away*: Jerry Schatzberg's *Street Smart*, 7:30 Sun. Fritz Lang's *Fury* (7:30) and Frank Capra's *Meet John Doe* (9:10), Thur. Max Ophuls' *The Earrings of Madame De* (7:30) and *Le Plaisir* (9:30), Fri. *A Tribute to Roberto Rossellini: A Pilot Returns* (2), *Open City* (7:30) and *Paisan* (9:20), Sat. Rice University campus. 527-4853.

**The Sicilian** — Michael Cimino's film of the Mario Puzo best-seller, about a Sicilian bandit chief (Christopher Lambert) who takes on the Mafia and the Church while attempting to lead Sicily to secede from Italy. Opens Friday.

## Theater

**The Blood Knot** — Non-Equity production of Athol Fugard's 1961 drama about two "coloured" South

stillskin, by Theatre on Wheels, 2 Sat through Nov. 7 at Carillon Arts Center, 10001 Westheimer, 953-1666.

**Come Blow Your Horn** — Non-Equity production of Neil Simon's Broadway 1961 comedy about a father trying to cope with two radically different sons, 8 Fri-Sat, 2:30 Sun through Nov. 15 at Actors Theatre of Houston, 2506 South Blvd., 529-6606.

**Deadwood Dick, Legend of the West** — Non-Equity Houston premiere of W.B. Burdine Jr.'s musical parody of 50s and '60s Westerns, 8 Thu-Sat, 5 Sun through Nov. 22 at The Ensemble, 3535 Main, 520-0055.

**Harvey** — Community theater production of Mary Chase's 1944 comedy about a man and an invisible rabbit. Last performances 6 today, 8 Fri-Sat at Kingwood Community Theater, Forest Cove Civic Center, 1126 Marina Dr., 540-9797.

**Henceforward...** — George Segal stars in Equity U.S. premiere of 1987 comedy written and directed by Alan Ayckbourn about a divorced electronic-music composer hoping to regain his creative powers by getting custody of his teen-age daughter, 8 Tue-Fri, 4 and 9 Sat, 2:30 and 7:30 Sun through Nov. 15 at Alley Theatre, 615 Texas, 228-8421.

**Interval** — Non-Equity production of Houstonian Jeannette Clift George's play about a relationship, a murder and a mystery, 8 Thu-Sat, 2:30 Sun through Nov. 8 at A.D. Players, 2710 W. Alabama, 526-2721.

**Merrily We Roll Along** — Non-Equity production of Stephen Sondheim's 1981 Broadway musical, based on Kaufman and Hart's reverse-chronology 1934 play, about how ambition strangles youthful idealism, 8 Thu-Sat, 5 Sun through Oct. 31 (no performance Oct. 18) at Stages Repertory Theatre, 3201 Allen Parkway, 52-STAGE.

**The Miss Firecracker Contest** — Non-Equity production of Beth Henley's 1981 off-Broadway comedy about a girl hoping to win a local beauty pageant and leave town in glory, 8 Fri-Sat through Nov. 7 at The Company Onstage, 536 Westbury Square, 726-1219.

**I Nuovi di Podrecca** — Puppet show by Italy's Compagnia di Marionette, featuring musical acts of classical and modern themes, as part of the Italy in Houston Festival. Last performances 3 and 6 today at St. John's School, 2401 Claremont Lane. Tickets: T.

**Quilters** — Non-Equity Houston premiere of Molly (*Shooting Stars*) Newman and Barbara Damashek's 1984 Broadway musical about pioneer women, 8 Thu-Sat, 4 Sun through Nov. 8 at Main Street Theater, 2540 Times, 524-6706.

**The Trust** — Non-Equity production of Houstonian Douglas Killgore's play about the murder of Rice University founder William Marsh Rice. Last performance 4 today by Main Street Theater at St. Regis Theater, 4205 San Felipe, 524-6706.

**Victoria's House** — Community theater production of Fred Carmichael's thriller about a man who thinks he's committed the perfect crime, 8:30 Fri-Sat through Oct. 31 at Playhouse 1960, 4714 FM 1960 West, 893-5789.

**Wait Until Dark** — Community theater production of Frederick Knott's 1966 thriller about a blind woman battling three thugs, 8 Fri-Sat through Oct. 31 at Encore Players, Meadows Center Mall, 729-3218.

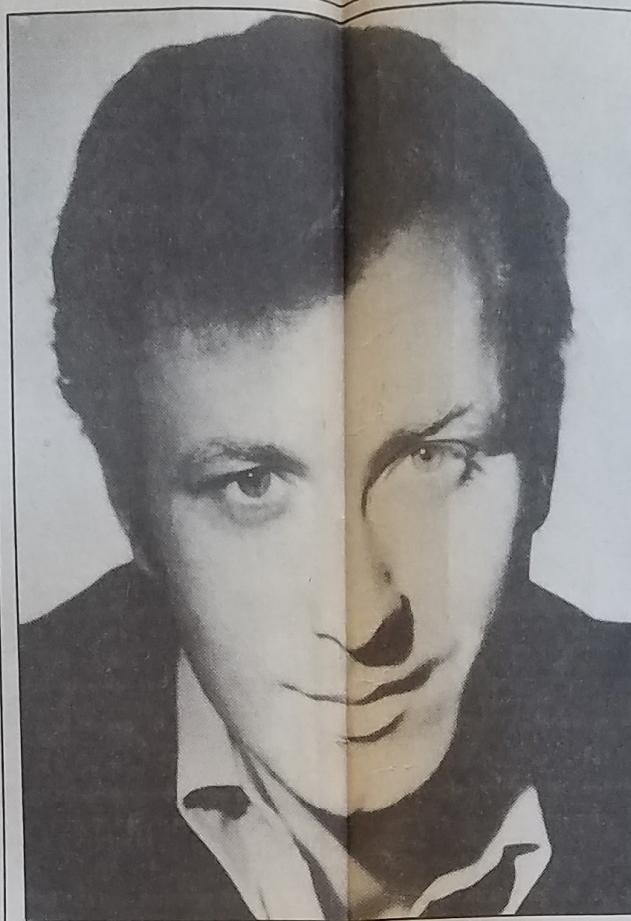
**What the Butler Saw** — Non-Equity production of Joe Orton's London farce about sexual shenanigans and coverups in a psychiatric hospital, 8 Thu-Sat, 2:30 Sun through Nov. 8 at Strand Street Theatre, 2317 Mechanic, Galveston, (409) 763-4591.

### OPENING

**Azzolatante** — Lina Sastri's one-woman show with traditional Neapolitan songs, as part of Italy in Houston Festival, 8 Mon only at Tower Theatre, 1201 Westheimer. Tickets: T.

**Evita** — Equity touring production of Andrew Lloyd Webber's Tony-winning 1978 London and 1979 Broadway musical about Argentine first lady Eva Peron, 8 Sat, 3 Oct. 25 at Galveston's 1894 Grand Opera House, 2020 Postoffice, 480-1894, (409) 765-1894.

**Five by Tenn** — The Acting Company in five one-acts by Tennessee Williams: *The Lady of Larksprout Location*, *The Long Goodbye*, *Portrait of a Madonna*, *Talk to Me like the Rain* and *Let Me Listen and This Property*.



Christof Perick conducts the Houston Symphony Friday at Jones Hall in a program of Wagner and Bruckner.

**Life of the Party** — Non-Equity Southwest premiere of Doug Holsclaw's 1986 drama about young people in San Francisco dealing with life, relationships and the AIDS crisis. Opens 8 Fri. Schedule thereafter: 8 Mon-Tue through Nov. 17 by The Group (Theatre Workshop) at Kindred Spirits, 4902 Richmond, 623-6135.

**The Passion of Dracula** — Non-Equity production of Bob Hall and David Richmond's thriller based on the Dracula legend, 8:30 Fri-Sat through Nov. 28 at Houston House Theatre, 1617 Fannin, 759-0701.

**Pulcinella** — Houston premiere of Manlio Santanelli's play about the *commedia dell'arte* character, from an unpublished text by Roberto Rossellini. Presented by the Teatro di Roma, as part of Italy in Houston Festival, 8 Wed, 6 Thu only at UH's Culver Auditorium. Tickets: T.

**Self Defense** — Equity Southwest

premiere of Joe Cacaci's 1987 off-Broadway drama about an idealistic New York public defender turned cynical by a judicial system geared to expediency more than justice. Previews 8 today, 8 Tue-Wed for 8 Thu

opening. Schedule thereafter: 8 Tue-Fri, 4 and 9 Sat, 2:30 and 7:30 Sun through Nov. 22 to launch the Neuhau Arena Stage season at Alley Theatre, 615 Texas, 228-8421.

**Whirlwinds** — Houston premiere of musical based on the life of Mozart's librettist Lorenzo da Ponte, by Antonio Di Pofi (music) and Roberto Ruffangi (book), as part of Italy in Houston Festival, 8 today, 6 Mon only at UH's Cullen Auditorium. Tickets: T.

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## Comedy

**Comedy Cabaret** — Performances 8 and 10:30 Fri-Sat, 204 Bender, Humble. Tickets: 540-1543, T.

**The Comedy Showcase** — Steve Epstein and Craig Bush, today. New Yorker Pete Lynch and Charles Shanon, Fri-Oct. 25. Performances 8:45 Wed (open-mike night), Thu and Sun, 8:30 and 10:45 Fri-Sat, 12:54 Gulf Freeway at Fuqua, 481-1188.

**Comedy West** — Chris Bliss, Dave Scheuber and Nancy Ford, 8 Thu, 8 and 10:30 Fri-Sat at Hyatt Regency West Hotel, 13210 Katy Freeway at Eldridge, 688-HAHA.

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**The Comedy Workshop** — *That's News to Me*, new comedy review about the stories behind the headlines, 8:30 Thu-Sat through Nov. 24. Kroc Center, 1201 Westheimer, 527-4853.

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# Composer transmits 'Nixon in China' irony

By CARL CUNNINGHAM  
Post Music Editor

The core of the orchestral sound in composer John Adams' *Nixon in China* is not a traditional operatic string section or anything resembling the twanging, percussive sound of Chinese instruments. It's a saxophone quartet with a Glenn Miller sound.

And the small, 33-member, wind-oriented orchestra is backed up by a late-model Yamaha HX synthesizer, which gives the whole orchestral texture "a rich superstructure of sound," Adams says. "It's almost like a blanket of sound at the bottom of everything and the only other way you can get that richness is with a 60-70 piece string section."

"There is no chinoiserie in this opera," he insists. "It's an absolutely, unmistakably American opera."

The orchestration of *Nixon in China* is certain to be deemed as important as the music itself, because, as stage director Peter Sellars puts it, "an ever-changing palette of orchestral colors is what John's music is all about." It's what powers Adams' big symphonic works, like *Harmonium* and *Harmonielehre*.

"The idea of the band came to me at the very beginning stages of thinking about the opera," Adams says, "because I was trying to imagine what kind of music would go with with characters like Richard and Pat Nixon. And it occurred to me that they probably fell in love to the music of the swing band era.

"And there's a personal reason for wanting, at least once in my life, to write for an ensemble like this, because both my mother and father were involved in swing band music in their younger years. My mother is a singer and my father is a saxophonist and clarinet player. He was my first teacher," Adams says.

Stripping off the orchestral colors and getting down to the notes themselves, Adams considers *Nixon in China* an interesting blend of two sides in "a kind of split personality, creatively."

"There seems to be a side of me that writes brooding, rather intense and serious pieces," he says, putting the big orchestral pieces, *Harmonium*, *Harmonielehre* and his string-orchestra piece, *Shaker Loops*, in this category.

"And then there's a joker side . . . I don't mean joker in a silly way," he says, "but I mean like in a deck of cards: a foil, a personality which is ironic and funny and makes a lot of use of vernacular."

Adams has fewer pieces to put in this bouncy, cheeky side of his compositional nature. He lists his early American Standards, paying tribute to march, hymn tune and jazz forms, his "wild, jubilant, funny . . . perhaps even vulgar" Grand Pianola Music, which has become one of his most controversial pieces, plus "several little rags and jazz pieces I've written as birthday presents for friends."

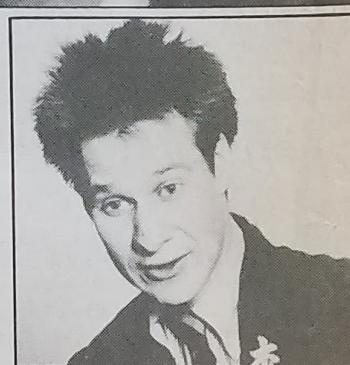
"Needless to say, an opera about Richard Nixon, Henry Kissinger and this event has got to have a certain ironic tone in it. You just can't deal with subject matters that are so familiar to the world at large and do it absolutely dead serious. You'd just be making a fool of



Composer John Adams (left) said he had to develop a musical style that could handle all of the shades of Nixon's character.



ALICE GOODMAN:  
Librettist



PETER SELLARS:  
Director

yourself, so you have to maintain a certain ironic distance," he says.

"Now by irony, I certainly don't mean satire, but I mean a certain sense of artifice and also humor.

"You know, Nixon is a very interesting character as I perceive him. He's very self-doubting and he's very visionary at times. He can be paranoid and he can be very ludicrous. At other times, he can be very sincere — and almost embarrassingly so.

"And so," Adams continues, "I had to develop a musical style that could handle all these shades of character. And, equally, I had to be able to handle the various other characters in the opera. So that was the main challenge, to find a musical style which could embrace all these different people without being either silly or pretentious."

With the musical style defined, one comes to the question of setting it to words. This is Adams' very first opera and only his second vocal work. Once stage director Peter Sellars had talked him into the project, Adams insisted upon a verse libretto rather than a prose text.

"Verse is on such an infinitely higher, elevated level," Adams says. As a man with a voracious appetite for good literature, he despairs the fact that Americans, unlike the English, have a terrible aversion to reading or quoting poetry. "They look at a poem in the New Yorker and they think: Oh, it's too much work. I'll read the movie review."

Adams' own aversion to the talkative dialogue that becomes sung recitative in opera may also have spurred him to insist upon a verse libretto. But librettist Alice Goodman filled the second scene of the opera with so much quick repartee between Mao, Nixon,

Chou and Kissinger, that he nearly threw in the towel.

"I had a real hard time with that scene and I called up Peter (who was the inevitable go-between) and said: 'Peter, this is just not going to work. I can't set music where one character says five words and then another character is saying five words.'

Sellars, who happened to have his TV turned to old Preston Sturges movie farces, where the repartee goes at such a frantic pace you can't hear half the words, had the perfect quick fix. "Try setting it very fast," he said, probably hanging up the phone just as fast.

So Adams rose to the challenge, putting "some really complicated and mysterious things" in that long, 25-minute scene. And now that he's heard it in many rehearsals of the opera, his insecurity about the scene seems to have faded. He proudly terms it "one of the best things I ever wrote."

Composing and orchestrating *Nixon in China* occupied Adams every day for 23 months, from late November 1985 until Oct. 3 of this year. And as he raced against time to get the last 300 bars orchestrated, his wife was even complaining that he locked the door and wouldn't answer her phone messages.

Though he's taking a deep breath now that his first opera is done, Adams knows he's hooked to try another one. "I'm sure I'll want to return to the form," he says, "because I find in certain ways it's far more challenging on an intellectual and emotional level than other kinds of music."

"Once you get bit by it, you understand why it is, when people like Wagner and Verdi got started, they just weren't interested in doing anything else."

## Nixon in China . . .

Continued from page 1F

opera.)

Thus, Sellars was challenged to throw out his whole tipsy scenario and set the scene against the grain of the Glenn Miller-ish dance music Adams had composed.

In this final, more sentimental, intimate version, the dance music yields up another background pantomime to a bedroom scene that

finds each of them looking back 30 years in their lives. Those were the days, Nixon tells Pat, when he was in the U. S. Navy and cooked hamburgers in Nick's Snack Shack for World War II fighter pilots on a Pacific atoll.

Meanwhile, the vulnerable, sexually rejected Madame Mao remembers her years as a young actress, entertaining communist

troops hiding out in the caves of Yenan and yielding her bony, half-starved body to young Mao's sexual urges.

And while the two couples look back on life's minutiae, the lonely Chou searches out the true historic meaning of this East/West encounter in a closing aria that seemingly lays the mantle of a Wagnerian demigod on his shoulders.

# Peter Sellars' conception of Nixon slowly altered

By CARL CUNNINGHAM  
Post Music Editor

The birth of an opera usually brings labor pains to more than just one parent. Thursday's Houston Grand Opera premiere of John Adams' *Nixon in China* is a good case in point.

The seed of the opera seems to have been floating around in the fertile imagination of its ingenious, revolutionary young stage director, Peter Sellars, as long as seven years ago.

But our operatic marriage broker had a much harder task convincing composer John Adams and librettist Alice Goodman that they were indeed the right parents to bring life to his theatrical fantasy on Richard Nixon's historic 1972 meeting with Mao Tse-tung.

As Sellars' memory whizzes back through his action-packed career, 1980 was the year when the young Harvard graduate very nearly dared to stage one of Madame Mao's correct revolutionary ballets for Greenwich Village's LaMaMa Experimental Theatre.

But after poring over hours of videos on these boring ballets, that theatrical lark was abandoned when Sellars thought about all the people who had died because of the Chinese Cultural Revolution.

However, the seed didn't die. In 1983, Sellars was doing one of his typical avant-garde opera stagings at New Hampshire's Monadnock Festival. The opera was Haydn's 18th-century *Armida* done in a Vietnam setting, with an American general caught in a peace-and-love-versus-duty conflict. All through it, Sellars kept thinking, "You know, we should really have new operas that don't have to make this translation (in time periods) — the issues could really just be dealt with absolutely directly."

"Then the title, *Nixon in China*, just pirouetted to mind," he says, "and I kept repeating it over and over across the next few weeks." By lucky coincidence, composer Adams happened to pop into the festival that summer for a performance of his string-orchestra piece, *Shaker Loops*.

"I met him and, you know, I realized that this was an opera composer. I heard *Shaker Loops* and I felt that sense of tensions building and releasing."

"We've been in an odd period when so much so-called musical theater turns out just to be not musically very interesting. And a lot of official contemporary music has been many things, but 'dramatic' is not primarily one of them. And suddenly you come across something that just has 'theater' written all over it — and a real flair and sense of drama."

So, the director was hooked, but the composer was not. "I said, well, let's do an opera, *Nixon in China*. And John thought I was joking and said: 'No.' And then a year later, I think it was, we saw each other somewhere else and he said: 'No, I want to do something serious.'

"Then he called me up about six months later and said: 'Are you serious about *Nixon in China*?' " And so, they finally started and Sellars went off to recruit his Harvard classmate, Alice Goodman, to write the libretto.

Research on Sellars' part seems to have evolved less from Kissinger's memoirs, *White House Years* (which Sellars contemptuously terms "unspeakable" and "tough sledding") than from Library of Congress materials and the Vanderbilt University video archives.

"We holed up at the Kennedy Center for three days,

pored through the research, brainstormed and, between the three of us, we sort of hacked out a libretto. Then Alice went away to write."

Once Sellars finally had his opera hatching, it was far easier to recruit David Gockley to produce it. Gockley met Sellars in the summer of 1984 "and asked me if I wanted to do something for Houston.

"And I said: 'Well sure, but let's do a new piece.' And David's one of the few directors in an opera company that you can say that . . . and he says 'sure' back."

But things did not always go smoothly in our little operatic triumvirate. "There was some initial tension, I think it's fair to say, between John, who was in San Francisco, and Alice, who was living in Cambridge, England. And I was exactly equidistant in Washington.

"John would call me and say: 'I can't work with this.' Alice would call me and say: 'I think John is not getting it.' And I was in the middle and in the meantime, I was just running the American National Theater, that's all.

"So finally, I just stopped returning the phone calls and the magic moment came when they finally had to call each other and fight it out without me."

But while Goodman and Adams turned from expensive phone calls to cheaper letters and developed an extensive, mutually supportive *Nixon in China* correspondence, they hadn't reckoned with the whims of a madcap director who kept changing the scenario after the ink was dry on words and music.

Particularly in the opera's problematic final scene, which Sellars changed from a public dinner-dance to a bedtime scene. To meet HGO's mandated 20-minute cut in the opera's total running time, Sellars also eliminated an intermission and joined this original third-act scene to the end of the second act.

"Of course, John and Alice were initially quite upset when I called them up and said: 'You know, I've scrapped all the stage directions and thrown out the set for Act III. And also, we can't have an Act III anymore,'" he laughs with riotous glee.

And there were other problems matching words, music, action . . . and even dance.

"I finally gave Alice the stage directions, which she wrote down in her own inimitable way, and then John composed it in a very idiosyncratic way. He'd put tons of music where there wasn't much action and where there was tons of action, there'd be four bars of music.

"And meanwhile, Mark Morris, the official choreographer, had not been consulted at all on any of this, because we could never get in touch with him."

Sellars' method of solving the final scene's much-revised scenario tells much about his thought processes. "When staging the ends of operas, I always save the end till the end. You've gotta first see what you've started and then let the *perpetuum mobile* of the drama carry itself out to its own logical point of continuation or conclusion.

"So, it wasn't until the third (and next-to-last) week of rehearsals that I figured out how this scene ended. I was very scared.

"I was so scared to stage the scene, I remember I called up Trudy (Ellen Craney, who plays Madame Mao) and Carolann (Page, who plays Pat Nixon) one afternoon and said: 'We're just gonna talk about what it might be like to rehearse it; I can't even rehearse it today.'

"And it kind of came that afternoon. And then the next day, we actually did stage it."

**H**ouston—*Nixon in China* smashed operatic (and political) prejudices here over the last few weeks. Diehard opera fans are accustomed to being jolted by the Houston Grand Opera, which presented the world premiere October 22. HGO is noted as both a haven for celebrity singers in interesting productions of the standards and as a producer of more new operas than any other American company except New York City Opera. A week after opening its two new houses in the Gus S. Wortham Theater Center with Verdi and Mozart standards, HGO hit its audience with the poetic, witty, and tragicomic *Nixon*—music by John Adams, libretto by Alice Goodman, direction by Peter Sellars.

This was a rare occasion when a minimalism-orientated composer stretched into areas of melodic eloquence ordinarily the province of conventional neoromanticists, although this was not the first time Adams had done so. (*Harmonium* is a good example.) *Nixon* was also special as an occasion for a literary poet, Goodman, to cocreate with a composer and director a genuine poetry of the theater. And it served notice that a director can be named legitimately among a work's creators, since it was Sellars's idea in the first place to make an opera out of Richard and Patricia Nixon's 1972 trip to the People's Republic of China. Just how well the idea was carried out can be discovered by New Yorkers when the show moves next month to the Brooklyn Academy of Music's Next Wave Festival.

Let's address a couple of obvious biases. Like many of us, I found no trouble in loathing Richard Nixon during the McCarthy and Watergate decades and the years between and since. But this opera exhibits Mr. and Mrs. Nixon so pathetically bewildered (and so emotionally interdependent) by their encounter with Red China that they easily become likable. Henry Kissinger, in this context, appears as an owl-faced stooge with professorial credentials flying at half-mast.

**The most fearsome character we meet is**, in fact, Chiang Ch'ing, the militant wife of Mao Tse-tung and moll of the Gang of Four. Chairman Mao comes onstage nearly paralyzed with illness, but he's a porcupine of philosophic, political, and amusingly materialistic needles that quickly fly at the visitors. Premier Chou En-lai, however, is the most sympathetic major character in that only he seems aware of the unease of both sides and yet, despite his superior intelligence and tact, can do nothing to help. No matter how accurate these character portrayals are—and I'm dubious about the Americans—they draw you in.

Because Goodman has said that her conception of the Nixons originally differed from Adams's and that the latter's in turn differed from Sellars's, we must assume that a compromise reached the stage. At any rate, to give you an idea of the opera, it's most useful to describe what happens on stage rather than in merely (!) the libretto or score. Also a bare-bones report on music and words would ignore the by turns boldly simple and graceful scenery by longtime Sellars designer Adrienne Lobel, the wittily accurate costumes (right down to the American-flag pin on Nixon's lapel) by Dunya Ramicova, the moody lighting by James F. Ingalls, and the galvanic choreography of Mark Morris, all of which were essential parts of the enterprise. This major opera looks as big as it sounds.

The first of the two acts (originally this was a three-act piece) begins with Chou and military ranks awaiting the landing of Air Force One, and the scene, perhaps the most musically minimal in the opera, works on that basis as strongly as the most energetic and energizing scene in Glass's *Satyagraha*, the apotheosizing of Ghandi's printing press. The comparison came to mind partly because the opening music is like a fast-forward version of those dozens of slowly rising scales in the Glass opera's final scene. But lay aside charges of imitation. Adams soon

*Nixon in China'*

# Songs of Chairman Mao

BY LEIGHTON KERNER



Pat (Carolann Page) and Dick (James Maddalena): Hey, everybody!

launches into a choral recitation of proper proverbs and then signals the descent of the plane (two-dimensional onstage, but otherwise full-scale) with an orchestral crescendo that piles up harmonic tension like no real minimalist would have any truck with. Nixon and Chou exchange greetings, but while the latter's are musically straightforward, Nixon's are riddled with nervous repeats of phrases as if not only the president's apprehension but also minimalism's repetition-disease were being parodied.

The second scene, in which Nixon meets Mao, is where the ideological tables, if not upturned, are at least swiveled on mischievous casters. Mao constantly keeps Nixon and Kissinger on the defensive, and, in fact, this is the only place where the music is kept out of the words' way, although it's certainly still part of the proceedings. Then comes the famous first banquet, with Chou's and Nixon's toasts punctuated with stirring choral outbursts of "Gam bei!" But Sellars staged the scene-opening conversations not in the Great Hall but in a hotel room, heightening the sense of two middle-class Americans in over their heads.

The long first scene of Act II is Pat's as

she tours a hospital (acupuncture surgery), farm (pets a pig), temples, and the Great Wall. God, is she idealistic about what she thinks she and her husband can do for these benighted peasants, and, God, is she touching (and not in the least contemptible) as Adams, Goodman, and Sellars treat her.

The Nixons follow this up with their

## MUSIC

visit to the ballet, in point of fact the celebrated blood-and-thunder dance *The Red Detachment of Women*. Here theatrical imagination runs wild and woolly. Morris must have had a great time taking key phrases from the original ballet (it's been seen in the West) and then developing his own continuations of them. With Kissinger somehow donning a Groucho Marx moustache and taking the role of the arch-villain, the ballet's melodramatics, brutalities, and schmaltz affect the Nixons so strongly that they too enter the action. The heroine is near death, but her lover brings her around, and Nixon offers him someone's discarded pistol for vengeance. But Pat, in one of the recent

theater's most gloriously silly and moving moments, takes away the gun and hands the girl a glass of orange juice, the drinking of which pushes her into a flurry of bouffées that seem to revive both life and romance.

But romance (and life) are suddenly brutalized as Madame Mao launches into an aria about her national status, her deliberately edgy high Ds acting as cue for muscle men to come in and waste some dissidents. Which leads to a final scene where the Nixons and the Maos remember younger, happier, surer times, a scene where there are no more villains, just national leaders sensing they are as blind as those they lead. And it's given to Chou to sing a closing threnody of public and private hopes and griefs.

In these circumstances, merely to name the performers is to salute them—James Maddalena and Carolann Page as the Nixons, John Duykers as Mao, Sanford Sylvan as Chou, Trudy Ellen Crane as Madame Mao, Heather Toma as the ballet's heroine, and Thomas Hammons as Kissinger. The other singers and dancers and a hard-running orchestra conducted by John DeMain fill out the roll of honor. Get those BAM tickets.

**T**he Wortham Center was sorely needed in Houston, since HGO for most of its existence has had to share space with the Houston Ballet and Symphony, not to mention the annual load of touring orchestras, recitalists, and musicals in the cavernous 3000-seat Bob Jones Hall. A multipurpose auditorium such as Jones invariably turns out to be ideal or near-ideal for no single purpose whatsoever, and the obvious realization of that fact by HGO's managing director, David Glockley, and other concerned parties—among them the philanthropic Wortham family—led to the new building just a block away from Jones. Between the two sites is the Alley Theater, one of the country's more prestigious drama organizations, and the three-part combination now results in a performing-arts center second only in capacity and potential scope to Lincoln Center as far as this country is concerned.

This is not to say that the Wortham is without drawbacks. The building is a high, huge, Romanesque-arched affair that looks from the outside and in its main lobby like a rail terminal commissioned by Mussolini. (Well, I suppose the curtains do go up on time.) True enough, there's more intermission space within the blandly peach-colored and monotonously plain-planed walls, but it seems you have to walk a mile for a coffee or a scotch. At least you get a choice between dozens of elevators and hundreds of steps to climb. The Brown Theater, which seats 2176 patrons amid the traditional red, is the more attractive of the two. Despite a dauntingly steep second balcony, most of the seats are within comfortable distance of the stage, which itself is well equipped to handle any sub-Zeffirelli production challenge. (Who could ask for anything more?) The pit can hold 110 musicians, which takes care of Wagner, Richard Strauss, and other big thinkers, and the acoustics for unamplified opera—*Aida* being the recent example—are certainly adequate. *Nixon*, which because of verbal and instrumental character was mixed to varying degrees, was what the former president would have deemed "perfectly clear" to anyone in center orchestra. But complaints about drowned-out voices were registered in the top balcony and downstairs as well, so perhaps the acoustical jury is still out.

The 1066-seat Cullen Theater, whose pit accommodates 44 players, proved ideal for *Abduction From the Seraglio* and would be just right for anything by Mozart, Handel, or, for that matter, Kurt Weill. Acoustically bright, its auditorium is a decorative bore, what with pallid side-columns and strips of silvery glitz. And I wonder whether the balcony has to be so high. Both theaters, by the way, have partly open ceilings fitted with barlike baffles, but somehow the sound of music is big enough for Texas, or anywhere. ■

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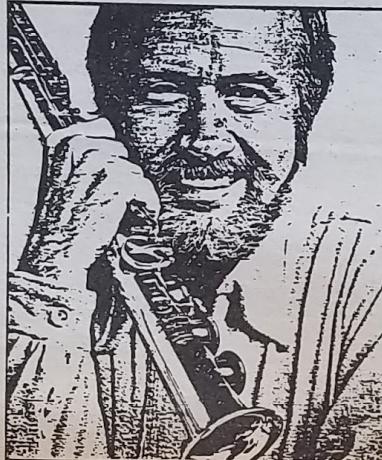
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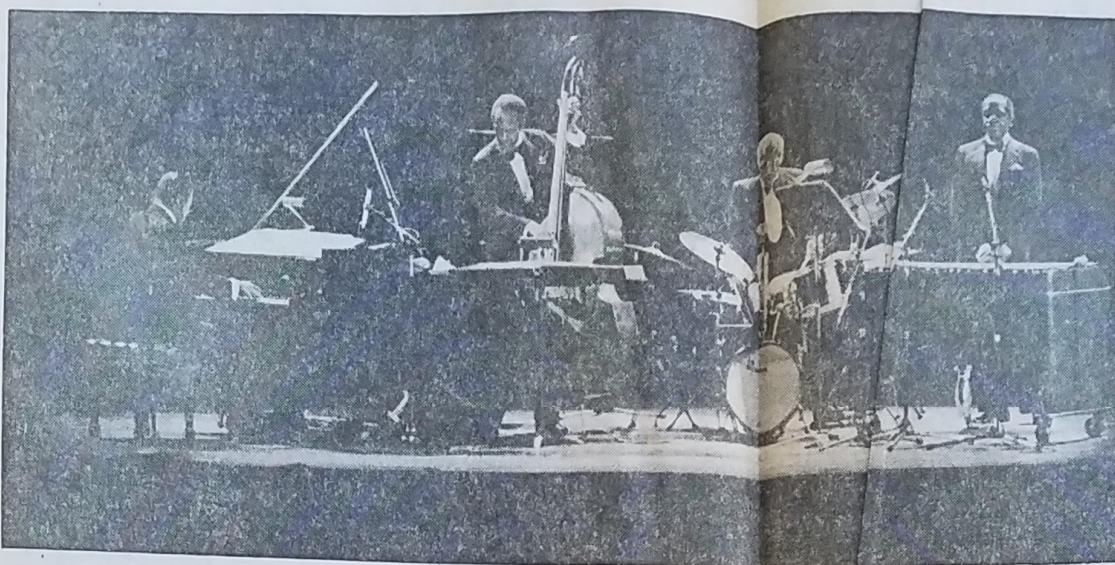
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San Francisco Chronicle

## DATEBOOK



John Lewis, Percy Heath, Connie Kay and Milt Jackson: the Modern Jazz Quartet at the Opera House Thursday night

## The MJQ: Starch and a Deft Touch

BY JESSE HAMLIN

Besides being one of the greatest improvisers in jazz history, vibraphonist Milt Jackson has a sardonic sense of humor that softens the starch of the Modern Jazz Quartet's tuxedo exterior.

Peering into the crowd at the Opera House Thursday night, Jackson smiled slyly and said, "I know that last piece was a little intricate for some of you. But I know you're gonna understand this one... If you don't, just slip out quietly at intermission."

The "intricate" tune was John Lewis' jazz fugue "Three Windows," a subtle and evocative piece from his "No Sun in Venice" film score. Like many classic MJQ pieces, it shifts from controlled Bach counterpoint to spontaneous swing, the written and the improvised merging into an exquisite design that unfolds through gradual or abrupt shifts in dynamics, time and mood.

On its heels came a simple blues that Jackson tore into with unleashed passion. Together, these two pieces capsulized the MJQ's singular allure and achievement: music that seamlessly joins the cerebral and the visceral, planned refinement and spontaneous invention, cool control and the flash of fire.

The MJQ — Jackson, Lewis, bassist Percy Heath and drummer Connie Kay — has been in business 35 years, the longest-running small group in jazz history. They went their separate ways in 1975, but re-united in 1981, and have been touring the world again ever since.

It was less than an sell-out crowd at the Opera House — the only Bay Area stop on their 35th anniversary tour — but those who came were rewarded with a definitive MJQ performance.

They played much of their standard repertoire — "D & E," "Django," "Milano," "True Blues," "Sash-

a's March," "Reunion Blues," "Ed-oces" — but none remotely resembled Xeroxes of earlier performances.

Lewis regularly rearranges the old tunes ("Milano" sounded like a new piece altogether). And their commitment to improvisation — they never seem to coast — breaths fresh air into this music.

They've played together for so long, and listen so closely, you sometimes can't tell where the written music ends and the new invention begins, particularly when the pulse is suspended and the music seems to float mysteriously in mid-air.

They premiered a new extended Lewis composition, inspired, he said, by the image of a group of young boys scaling the walls of a grand chateau on the French Riviera after seeing a beautiful girl looking out the window.

It builds on a playful eight-note motif, passed from piano to vibes to bass and carried through the piece's

shifting moods, and features a door-knocking six-note snare drum phrase that's tossed around the band.

Lewis' compelling piano solo — he improvises with a composer's sense of structure — touched bases with Strayhorn, Fats Waller, Debussy and Chopin.

An older piece, "A Day in Dubrovnik," was painted with Bach, bebop and Balkan colors. "Sasha's March" featured a remarkable Connie Kay drum solo that was simultaneously powerful and delicate; this snare roll comes down so softly it barely hisses.

Perhaps the most beautiful number was "One Never Knows," from "No Sun in Venice." Lewis played a hesitating, bare-bones piano line that floated above a shadowy vibraphone ostinato, a resounding modal note and the mysterious and methodical ringing of a triangle. It was one of those rare sonic moments that seems to freeze in time.

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## \$4.3 Million for Mozart Manuscript

London

A mystery buyer yesterday paid a record \$4.34 million at auction for a bound volume of nine complete symphonies of Wolfgang Mozart in his handwriting.

Sotheby's auction house, which conducted the sale, described the work as "the most important music manuscript to be auctioned this century."

The manuscript was purchased for 2.6 million pounds by London picture dealer James Kirkman, who declined to say for whom he was

declined to

## Rourke's Biker Antics Rile His Neighbors

**HOLLYWOOD  
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Frank Swertlow

**M**ickey Rourke's outburst against producer **Samuel Goldwyn Jr.**, the other day at the Cannes Film Festival came as no surprise to his neighbors in Beverly Hills. Rourke, who rents an apartment on Maple Drive, has been known to arrive late at night with friends who frequently rev their motorcycles, waking residents, according to a neighbor who asked for anonymity. Rourke and friends, according to the source, have also rolled their motorcycles into the apartment building's courtyard and blocked entrances.

"It's great when he is out of town on location, but then he comes roaring back and creates all sorts of scenes," said another source. One female tenant, who lived under Rourke's apartment, made repeated attempts to get the actor to be neighborly. She even circulated a petition asking the owners of the building to remove Rourke. Unsuccessful, she moved out, according to the source. Another source said the actor "uses the place as an office and crash pad for his biker buddies." Complaints to the Beverly Hills police, the source said, also were unsuccessful in abating Rourke's activities.

The actor's agent, **Belle Zwedling**, said, "I have no comment. I don't know what he does at night. I don't live with him." Rourke's attorney, **Bill Sobel**, had "no comment." **Gary Peskin**, the manager of the apartment building on Maple Drive, did not return calls. **Mildred Peskin**, a co-owner of the Maple Drive apartment building, declined to be interviewed.

Back in Cannes, Rourke had verbally attacked Goldwyn during a news conference held for Cannon Group's "Barfly," in which Rourke plays a Skid Row poet. Rourke seemingly was upset at Goldwyn's handling of the as yet unreleased film, "A Prayer for the Dying," starring Rourke and produced by Goldwyn.

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"Bright Lights, Big City," starring **Michael J. Fox**, which is now being filmed in the Big Apple. The flick, produced by **Sydney Pollack** and **Mark Rosenberg**, is being directed by **James Bridges** and is based on **Jay McInerney's** tale about the drug journey of a magazine researcher.

■ Former President **Richard Nixon** has rejected an offer to hawk **Honda** scooters.

■ Fox Broadcasting may have had its troubles with **Joan Rivers**, but one star who seems to be emerging from its new prime-time lineup is **Johnny Depp** from "21 Jump Street."

Ironically, Johnny, who plays a high school undercover cop, is a high school drop-out. "I was playing in a band at all hours of the night, and I was falling behind in my school stuff," said the native of Miramar, Fla., just north of Miami. "It was a big mistake, definitely. High school is a breeze compared to real life. All you have to worry about is homework, not paying the rent and making money."

Johnny, who has appeared in such films as "Platoon" and "Nightmare on Elm Street," cautions teenagers not to follow his footsteps. "Kids come up to me and say, 'You dropped out, and you were lucky.' But I can't stress it enough. I've been lucky, I am one in a million."

Even with his success, Johnny hasn't forgotten what it was like to struggle after high school. "I was alone in my apartment in Miramar with no electricity, no phone; it was April, and my Christmas tree was still up." That was 1982; in 1983, he went west with his rock band, but nothing clicked. "I remember walking down Hollywood Boulevard, wondering where I was going to get a couple of bucks to get some cigarettes."

Johnny is enjoying his success now, and like a lot of folks kissed by stardom, he is going out and buying a car — a convertible, but not a fancy exotic that speeds from one repair shop to the next. "I am in the

market for a 1967 Impala," he said. "They're great cars." Sounds like a star who hasn't gone Hollywood.

■ **Linda Koslowski**, who emerged a star from "Crocodile Dundee," was in Australia recently, preparing to return to Crock II, when she told a TV interviewer that she was interested in developing a singing career. Presto: three offers for a record deal. Her next flick will be "Pass the Ammunition," which is being described as a **Tammy Bakker**-like tale for New Century Vista.

A musically atmosphere dominated. All six Rat Band members took lengthy solos, with saxist Terry Hanek providing his share of the vocals when Salgado was offstage, with pianist Jimmy Pugh and guitarist Kaihatsu especially impressive in their respective turns.

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# The 'Stars Wars' Success — Ten Years After

BY ALJEAN HARMETZ

NEW YORK TIMES

## Hollywood

Exactly one decade ago, the Millennium Falcon sailed the skies of the Galactic Empire for the first time — and transformed the motion picture industry.

"Star Wars" opened on May 25, 1977, the Wednesday before the Memorial Day weekend, and became the most successful movie in history. The saga of Luke Skywalker, Han Solo, Obi-Wan Kenobi and Darth Vader sold more than \$400 million worth of tickets in North America alone. "Jaws," in second place, was \$125 million behind.

The unprecedented success of a movie set in a galaxy long ago and far away turned Hollywood's attitudes toward science fiction upside down, changed the industry's definition of summer, re-established symphonic music in films, exploded the boundaries of special effects, helped unleash eight years of movies aimed at teenagers, gave new importance to sound, created a pop mythology, and made merchandising the characters from a movie as important as the movie itself.

It also turned a shy 33-year-old director from California's sun-baked central valley into a movie mogul.

Looking back 10 years, George Lucas still remembers what he hoped for then: that "Star Wars" would make enough money to allow him to produce a sequel. "Star Wars" was actually "Episode IV: A New Hope" of a nine-film saga that had played in his mind for years as a serial.

What happened was "pretty amazing," he said in his slow, careful country twang. He was telephoning from Skywalker Ranch, his 3,000-acre film-production domain in Northern California — 3,000 acres of redwood groves, meadows of wild flowers and state-of-the-art post-production equipment. He had been in London the week before. Two days later he would fly to London again.

Since he finished the "Star Wars" trilogy with "Return of the Jedi" in 1983, he has been lending his name and financial clout to other people's movies ("Howard the Duck") or collaborating with Steven Spielberg ("Indiana Jones"). Now, in London, he is making "Willow," his own undisguised fairy tale populated by elves, fairies and trolls — reworking the themes of good vs. evil and personal accountability that were to him the essence of "Star Wars."

"The underlying issues, the psychological motives, in all my movies have been the same," he said. "Personal responsibility and friendship, the importance of a compassionate life as opposed to a passionate life."

He said he thought the success



The 'Star Wars' characters — Chewbacca, Luke Skywalker, Obi-Wan Kenobi and Han Solo — have become household words in the 10 years since the movie was released

of "Star Wars" was the combination of "classic themes told in an innovative way." Lucasfilm has been responsible for creating advanced editing equipment and a new sound system for theaters. Industrial Light and Magic, Lucasfilm's special effects company, has revolutionized special effects.

The "Star Wars" trilogy has sold more than \$1.2 billion worth of tickets and \$1.5 billion worth of books, toys, pillows, T-shirts, posters and lunch boxes.

George Lucas effectively moved the summer forward two weeks, from the middle of June to the end of May," said Tom Sherak, president

of distribution at 20th Century Fox. "The Wednesday before Memorial Day is called George Lucas Day." This week Paramount opened "Beverly Hills Cop II" on George Lucas Day.

If the effects of "Star Wars" on the movie industry were great, the effects on Lucas were greater. It allowed him to finance "The Empire Strikes Back" himself and, with the profits of that movie, to build Skywalker Ranch and his film technology empire and to reap a personal fortune of \$50 million — most of which he eventually lost in a divorce. Divorce is a very difficult thing financially and emotionally. I went into a several-year tailspin."

He pulled out of the tailspin simply by growing a little. "I am

difficult to deal with, very disruptive to Oz's personal life," said Lucas, who has just turned 43. "It took eight years and a lot of creative energy and emotional torment to complete the movies. Then the divorce. Divorce is a very difficult thing financially and emotionally. I went into a several-year tailspin."

That kind of success is very

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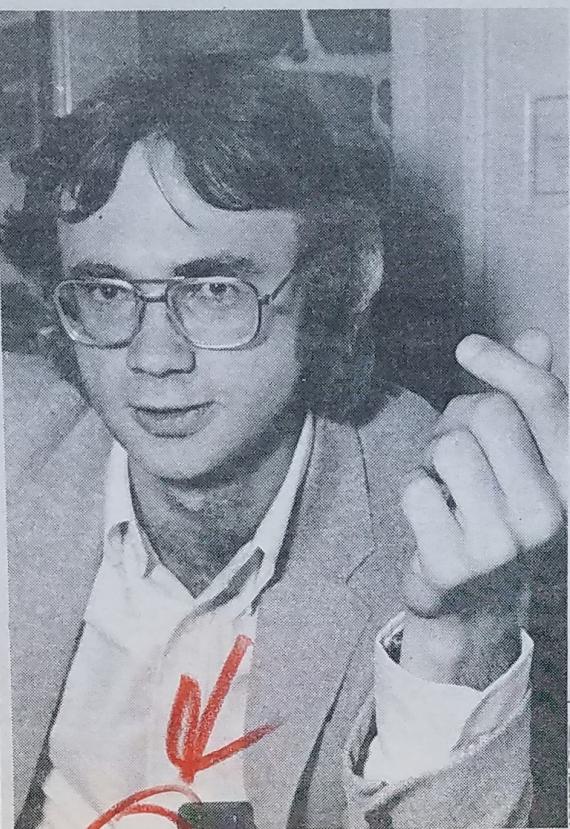
By Linda Sanders

Violent. Exorcistic. Almost psychotic. A dream: huge tanker shoots off the surface of San Francisco Bay like a rocket. Biblical trial. The Anfortas Wound. Sickness and infirmity, both physical and spiritual. Meister Eckhardt floating through the firmament with a baby on his shoulders who whispers the secret of grace into his ear.

These are some words and images in John Adams's liner note discussion of his orchestral work, *Harmonielehre* (Noneuch). The words are lifted from their conversational context, but I think they give you an idea of the piece's ambition. The title refers to Schönberg's study of harmony, but Adams says he's concerned "with harmony in the larger sense, in the sense of spiritual and psychological harmony," that it's "a kind of allegory for [the] quest for grace."

Only a few years ago it would have been unusual for an important young American composer to compare writing music with a biblical trial, or that there was an emotional/spiritual program in a given composition. But in the current climate—call it "New Romanticism," or don't—orchestral composers are encouraged to draw upon the unfettered range of their emotional and intellectual lives. They're writing pieces that are accessible, communicative, even popular; they're not shy about going for the Big Statement. In short, they're writing music that does what classical audiences want music to do.

Sounds healthy, doesn't it? From the point of view of contemporary orchestral music's actual survival, it probably is. But the side-effect of all this affirmation is that tags like "accessible," "communicative," even, god forbid, "tonal," have become virtues in themselves, rather



John Adams: not shy about going for the Big Statement.

than mere characteristics or conditions for deciding whether a piece has any *real* virtues. It shouldn't be necessary to point out that you can write the most accessible, communicative, and tonal piece in the world—like Adams's *Harmonielehre*—and still have problems.

*Harmonielehre* is too good to call an honorable failure, but there is a gap be-

tween its intent and execution. Adams wrote it after a long fallow period; one gathers that the piece's program is, at least in part, the story of its own painful creation. If you think of Adams as the quasiminimalist of *Shaker Loops*, you're in for a surprise; better to think of Mahler, Sibelius, and the omnipresent shades of Schönberg and Stravinsky. Adams's orchestral writing is spectacular (and given its full due on this record by Edo De Waart and the San Francisco Symphony). Within a lush 19th century sonic framework, he incorporates his own signature traits, like a slowed-down harmonic tempo and busy, repetitive rhythms. Unfortunately, the piece goes beyond fleeting references to the old masters and begs comparison with them. It's not a happy reminder.

Two illustrations come to mind. Adams describes the slow second movement, subtitled "The Anfortas Wound," as "a musical scenario about impotence and spiritual sickness," during

which there's a climax "that's almost psychotic—the music literally screams." This is the stuff of late German Romanticism, and Adams renders just that kind of buildup, one that culminates in the shrieking collapse of tutti violins in a falling glissando. But such a patented effect comes across not as psychosis but as the anguish of the well-read composer mak-

ing what he can of an anachronistic medium. The third movement is subtitled "Meister Eckhardt and Quackie." (The latter is Adams's nickname for his daughter). It's not that the music isn't attractive, it's the way it's attractive: upbeat tempo, high woodwind filigree, string harmonics, major keys—all the musical claptrap of the twinkling firmament. If, as so many people have insisted, orchestral music has been a purgatory since 1945, have we really gone through all that torment just to arrive at twinkling as a metaphor for grace?

## SOUNDINGS

Another major composer with a major statement on his mind is Steve Reich. I didn't hear the American premiere at BAM last season but hearing *The Desert Music* (Noneuch) now, I wonder what the fuss has been about; it seems like a simple—if uncharacteristic—case of compositional misfire. About 50 minutes long, it's scored for Reich's ensemble, chorus, and orchestra (precisely conducted on this LP by Michael Tilson Thomas), and uses several fragments of William Carlos Williams for its text. Reich has been anything but casual about setting these words, but I find the overall effect grating: too many awkward stresses, too much distortion, too much shrill women's singing. (That worked better in *Tehillim*.) Reich's usual pizzazz gives way in the third movement to an interminable canonic section for strings playing leaden figures; throughout, brass play clouds of jazzy, "feel-good" chords that Reich seems wedded to these days. (Those worked better in *Music for a Large Ensemble*.) There's one devastating moment, when all activity drops to a sinister, quiet pulsation, just before the chorus invokes the specter of nuclear war. (That worked better in *The Rite of Spring*.) The last movement has the sheen and propulsion that's more typical of Reich, but it's too little, too late. ■

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## ELIZABETH BROUN

The Subtle Power  
Of Peepholes

To the Editor:

Let me reframe the debate around Elizabeth Broun's removal of Sol LeWitt's "artwork" from the exhibition "Edward Muybridge and Contemporary America Photography" in the National Museum of American Art [ "Peering Into Peepholes and Finding Politics," by Michael Kimmelman, July 21]. Change the category from sex to race. If Mr. LeWitt had made a degrading image of a black person, everyone would understand Ms. Broun's action, even if they disagreed with her methods. When African-Americans reject demeaning images of themselves, no one accuses them of "bullying antiracism." We understand, because they now refuse to be silent when a white person tries to humiliate them. We no longer defend racist language with the white sword of moral authority. We call the white image maker to task, not the black protester.

Women finally see the connection between "artistic" objectification of their bodies and the near state of war being waged against them. Yes, a powerful, unconscious connection exists between Mr. LeWitt's "artwork" and the rape and murder of women. Elizabeth Broun's protest against the undisputed right of men to use women's bodies for pleasure and power might bring the debate into the open, could choose to reflect ... and curators rather than deflect them onto issues of censorship.

Have you ever noticed that the only complaints about politically correct language come from those in power?

## ANNETTE BENING

Fargo  
Virginia Woolf

To the Editor:

Annette Bening may think she is a woman for the 90's, but when it comes to intellectual perceptiveness she sounds more like a leftover from the Neanderthal period [ "Annette Bening, Hot but Cool," July 7]. She cannot fathom that feminism and humanism are absolutely not mutually exclusive, and that neither Henrik Ibsen nor Virginia Woolf would find any divisiveness between the two. Woolf would probably have been much offended if she heard Ms. Bening denigrating the women's movement for its "sturdiness and seriousness and dogmatic humorlessness ... a real turnoff."

Ms. Bening, take my advice. Don't ever try to act the part of Virginia Woolf in "A Room of One's Own." Eileen Atkins you are not.

CINDY NEMSER

Brooklyn

## MOSTLY MOZART

How the Baby  
Was Born

To the Editor:

The birth of the Mostly Mozart Festival was anything but a commitment to develop a scheme to [ "Mostly Mozart" open in July and August,] as William W. Lockwood Jr. recently wrote [ "The Birth of Mostly Mozart, as One Founder Remembers

It," July 7]. It was, in fact, a decision made by William Schuman, then president of Lincoln Center, to create summertime employment opportunities for New York's freelance musicians.

As the person who initially met with him to suggest 30 days of Mozart performed by the core players of the Chicago Symphony — independently financed by my organization — I was both startled and moved when William Schuman responded to my idea favorably but suggested that, if we used New York musicians, Lincoln Center would put its name behind the project and finance it totally.

Obviously, the rest is history. As Mr. Lockwood correctly states, "a gang of four" was eventually summoned to discuss the idea. But the fact is that we met only to insure that the birthing of the festival be a joyous one, not to consider whether or not we'd name the baby Mozart or for that matter whether having a musical kid in the middle of the summer made sense.

JAY K. HOFFMAN  
President,  
Jay K. Hoffman & Associates  
New York

Although he sang a wide range of roles, from Mozart to Roger Sessions, at houses including the Met and Glyndebourne Festival Opera, it is for his services to contemporary American song that Gramm will be remembered. His recordings of works by Ned Rorem, John Duke, Theodore Chanler, Paul Bowles and others are exemplary in the literal sense and ought to be required listening for native singers, not only for their unforced beauty of tone but also for the clarity and naturalness of Gramm's thoroughly North American English.

Everyone who worked with Gramm has several "Donald stories," many centering on his ability to



Illustrations by Alison Seiffer

Alliterative  
Options

To the Editor:  
The longstanding success of the Mostly Mozart program each summer at Lincoln Center makes me wonder why other composers have not been similarly accorded their own nearly exclusive festivals, alliteratively titled. Think of the possibilities: Basically Berlioz. Largely Liszt. Almost All-Albinoni. Intrinsically Ives. Chiefly Copland. Predominantly Palestrina. Fundamentally Fauré. Essentially Elgar. Generally Gluck. Roughly Rossini. And — since I suppose it's about time that the bientennial boy's nemesis was given his due — Substantially Salieri.

DAVID ENGLISH

Somerville, Mass.

## OPERATIC BARITONES

Donald Gramm:  
Required Listening

To the Editor:  
The "missing link" between the great line of American operatic baritones [ "A Room of One's Own," by Sanford Sylvan [Recordings View, by Will Crutchfield, July 21] is surely Donald Gramm, who died in 1983.

cover a memory lapse in performance with brilliant improvisation (in any language). On stage he achieved memorable comic and tragic performances through his unique brand of riveting understatement.

Gramm's portrayal of Rossini's Dr. Bartolo and Verdi's Falstaff are preserved on video, though not, alas, his Glyndebourne Nick Shadow in "The Rake's Progress" or his Met Dr. Schoen in "Lulu."

Let us hope that his valuable song legacy, much of it originally issued on small labels, will not be allowed to molder in the vinyl graveyard but will reappear on CD for the pleasure of listeners everywhere. And can't some higher-up at WGBH-TV in Boston do a thorough search of the station's archives for the mini-recitals that Gramm taped as "filler" for the original showings of Masterpiece Theater?

NICHOLAS DEUTSCH

New York

The Times welcomes letters from readers. Letters must include the writer's name, address and telephone number. We regret that we cannot return letters or return unpublished letters. Those selected may be edited to fit allotted space.

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— Patrick J. Smith, Opera News

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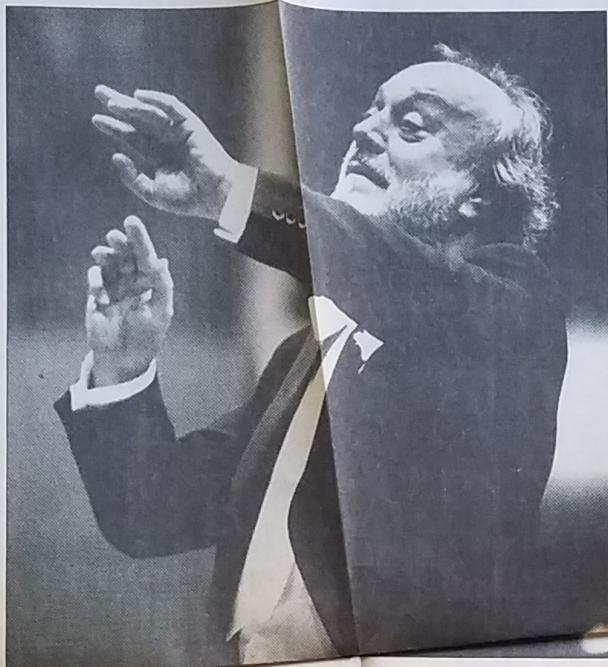
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of ALPA at Delta. "They're much more person-oriented than any other airline, so it's hard for a union to succeed. I'll bet if you talk to pilots for every other airline and ask them who they would like to work for, 100% would say 'Delta.'"

To find compatible employees, Delta spends an inordinate amount of time on pre-employment interviews. This atmosphere isn't for everyone. Some applicants walk away when they learn, for example, that Delta's conservative codes do not allow women to wear miniskirts or men to sport earrings. Some employees, such as ramp and ticket agents and cabin clean-up crew, are hired first as temporaries—they don't receive paid holidays, sick days or vacation—a designation they may hold for as long as six years. Extensive use of temps, as much as 10% of its work force, helps Delta preserve that tradition of no layoffs and enables managers to be sure of new hires. Says John Pincavage, partner at the New York City-based financial consulting firm Transportation Group: "With this system, Delta gets to find out if an employee is right for them—conservative, hard-working, loyal. Delta people underestimate their accomplishments, they're quiet and go about their job," he says. "They are a whole different culture from other airlines."

**DELTA'S CAPTAIN**—ITS CHAIRMAN AND CHIEF executive—is a far cry from the silk-scarf romantics who founded the aviation industry early this century. Nor is he a modern bare-knuckles marketing whiz like American's chairman, Robert L. Crandall, or a smooth turnaround specialist like Stephen M. Wolf, chairman of United.

Delta's Ronald W. Allen, 49, a tall, gregarious Atlanta native and "good ol' boy" from Georgia Tech, may well be the only CEO in America who has vaulted into the management cockpit via the personnel department—a backwater at most companies. Allen never held an operating, or "line," job with responsibility for an exciting part of the aviation business: scheduling or flight operations, maintenance or equipment purchase, or in-flight service. Instead, this earnest corporate bureaucrat was handpicked and groomed at a young age by former CEO Thomas Beebe. He shot up through the ranks by running departments such as methods and training, personnel, and administration. An industrial engineer by education, Allen took over in August, 1987.

If his principal job is the care and feeding of the 62,900 permanent employees, Allen seems an inspired choice. Relaxing on the sofa in his walnut-paneled office filled with airplane models, he appears to be an informal chief executive. One of his favorite items on display is a screwdriver mounted on a plaque, a gift from Delta mechanics. On a flight of a new Boeing 757 a few years ago, passenger Allen learned that a man was trapped in the lavatory. Allen grabbed a knife from the galley and freed the grateful prisoner. The mechanics thought he could use a screwdriver for the next emergency.

Allen is almost boyish when he exclaims, "I love to sit through personnel meetings!" He muses, "Cultivating a motivated and loyal work force is a tradition. Delta founder C. E. Woolman started it, and management is dedicated to building on what he began." "Delta justifies its employees' faith," says Lloyd-Jones, who today is president of American Express Bank's Aviation Services Inc. "Walk with Ron Allen through a maintenance base, and you will see him stop and talk and call workers by name."

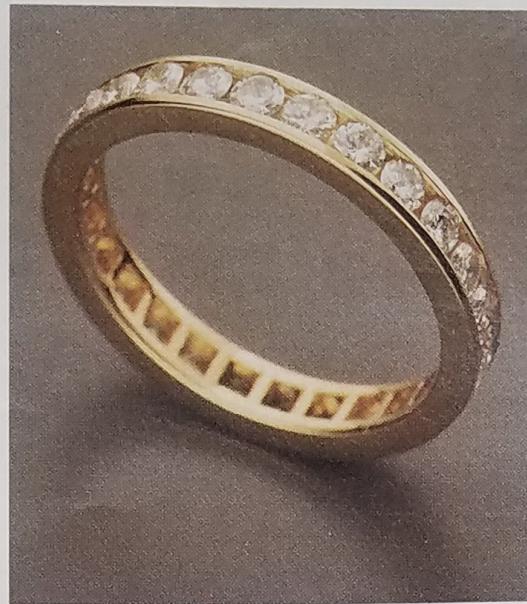
As the company has grown, management has formalized two-way communications essential to high morale. Delta department heads are required to meet once every 18 to 24 months in groups that encompass all those who report to them. The agenda: Management passes on goals, strategies and future plans, and invites questions. Delta department liaisons take notes and supply a written response to anyone whose question cannot be answered immediately.

"I read every single file," Allen says. "It's a joke around here when a question is asked and someone says, 'I'll get back to you on that.' In most companies, no one does. We do." He loves to tell stories about the peanuts and beer. A few years ago, when peanuts started to get expensive, Delta decided to cut them out. But customers grumbled to flight attendants. "Flight attendants felt terrible," says Allen, "and morale began to drop." The same thing happened with beer. Beer is hard to transport because it's heavy and must be refrigerated. "But," says Allen, "passengers want a beer with their peanuts." To prevent further erosion in flight-attendant *esprit*, Delta reconfigured aircraft to carry the bulky beer and reinstated the peanuts.

Allen acknowledges that the second pillar of Delta's strength is a solid balance sheet. Conservative fiscal policies allow Delta not only to ride out bad years in a notoriously cyclical industry but also to

*Continued on Page 32*

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# THE TRICKSTER

**J**ohn Adams is home from the wars. A veteran of art's most grueling campaign—the creation of a contemporary opera—he has a wound to show for it: tendinitis in his right shoulder. He hurt himself by composing for more than 18 months, seven days a week, hour after hour, writing with pencil, 30 lines to the page, in a narrow upstairs room crowded with a grand piano, a bank of synthesizers, several samplers, a word processor, a printer and a tape recorder.

"I'm not sure I'll be able to conduct for several months," says Adams, who is sprawled on a chair in the tiny living room of his modest Berkeley home. He rolls his right shoulder like a sore-armed pitcher. "I've got some bad habits. I'm 44, and my body isn't as supple as it used to be, and I write for eight hours a day and I don't stand up and I don't stretch and now I hurt myself."

The hurt was worth it. "The Death of Klinghoffer," his second ambitious opera in four years, recently premiered in Brussels. Most modern operas tend to vanish into recording history soon after an

be. Absent? Hardly. Adams is down-to-earth, his natural New England severity mellowed by two decades of California life into a laid-back graciousness. Even after having been hounded in Europe like a superstar during the "Klinghoffer" run, Adams remains cordial and articulate, speaking in complex sentences in a gentle sing-song cadence that pulsates like the waves of sound in his quasi-minimalist compositions.

He's concerned that those who haven't seen "Klinghoffer" might denounce it as anti-Semitic, anti-Arabic and/or pro-terrorist. Adams scans yet another newspaper article on the premiere, sighing wearily. "This is so weird. This writer quotes

me at a press conference as asking: 'What else does America export except smart bombs?' What I said was: 'I'm glad that there's an opportunity for people to see something from America besides our bombs and machismo.'

The Gulf War remains very much on Adams' mind. "Klinghoffer" ritually examines centuries-old religious conflicts among Arabs, Jews and Christians. Unlike "Nixon," which dealt ironically

## Composer John Adams Keeps Reinventing Himself, to Wilder and Wilder Applause • By Richard Stayton

unveiling. Yet despite its controversial subject—the infamous 1986 hijacking of the Italian cruise liner Achille Lauro by Palestinians and the murder of an elderly Jewish-American, Leon Klinghoffer, a tourist confined to a wheelchair—Adams' opera is in the middle of an international run of performances that includes Brussels, France's Lyon Opera and Vienna and will conclude 1991 at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. Next year will witness a staging by the Los Angeles Music Center Opera and a production at the San Francisco Opera.

Seated near the 1989 Grammy award for his earlier opera, "Nixon in China," Adams can't even recuperate in peace. There are too many troubles on the home front. His Honda was stolen. His wife, Deborah O'Grady, is at the bank trying to resolve complications so that the family can move into a bigger Berkeley home with substantially more studio space. On this morning, his son Sam woke up ill. The family's dog, a beagle named Flora, races crazily through the house in pursuit of imagined demons. And the telephone won't stop ringing.

Adams' prematurely gray hair looks wind-swept, and he blinks through spectacles as if preoccupied, looking every bit the part of an absent-minded, longhaired composer. But his Harvard-trained intellect is anything but absent. Jet-lagged? Yes. Burned-out? May-

with the historic Beijing meeting between Chairman Mao and the former President, "Klinghoffer" is more stylized and ritualistic, modeled on Bach's "St. Matthew" Passion. Adams views the murder of Klinghoffer as "a ritualized crucifixion." The gospel according to Adams is that Klinghoffer, like Christ and other indiscriminate victims through the ages, was an innocent who died for the sins of all. The God beseeched is the one God of Abraham and Islam. "People were very confused and disoriented," he says, "because they expected a 'Nixon in China.' "

Instead, an audience overflowing with critics confronted an abstract constructivist set by George Tyspin of huge steel girders and gangplanks that James Ingall's lighting alternately transformed into flickering oil refineries at night, a boat or an ambiguous religious structure. Instead of hijackers in lurid garb and tourists in Bermuda shorts, the costumes were all what Adams labels "anti-costumes: simple, anonymous blouses in muted colors." Director Peter Sellars borrowed from rock concerts by employing huge screens for video close-ups of soloists. Celebrated choreographer Mark Morris avoided spectacular dance numbers, opting instead for semaphore-like gestures that resemble a chorus in a Greek tragedy.

# OF MODERN MUSIC

Dan Escobar

LOS ANGELES TIMES MAGAZINE, JUNE 16, 1991 21

And the Adams score? Although the British press—still outraged by Sellars' "Magic Flute," set against the landscape of L.A.—was vitriolic ("strongly hollow," sniffed the *Financial Times* of London), most of the reviews had been laudatory. "A triumphant debut," judged *Newsweek*, praising the music as "lush, considered and cathartic" and "revolutionary" for good measure. Perhaps that referred to Adams' integration of keyboard synthesizers into the orchestration—or to his sophisticated use of computer-controlled microphones to combine the singers and the 80-member orchestra.

To outraged purists, Adams says: "These days we go to the opera and get people who are 400 pounds and have enormous bodies and enormous vocal resonators in order to cut over an orchestra and be heard by the 3,000th person in the balcony. What's more unnatural, a speaker and a mike or a person who's evolved to a state of looking like a refrigerator?"

NO, THE WORD REVOLUTIONARY doesn't quite fit this composer. Adams is an

done it!" Myrow thought during the concert.

"Adams had made the big split from the three most influential European composers: Berio, Boulez and Stockhausen. He's employing a new aesthetic, informed by the computer-synthesizer age," Myrow realized. "Now Adams utilizes minimalist techniques in the service of a much higher and more ambitious musical architecture than Philip Glass. [Aaron] Copland's staggering originality had not reappeared in American music until Adams. He's alone at the top."

Myrow, inspired, returned to serious composing for the first time in 16 years, resulting in the composition "Frontiers," a piece using two keyboard synthesizers and more than 90 instruments that will premier in August at the Aspen Music Festival. Hidden within the third movement, Myrow laughs, "is a secret 15-bar homage to John Adams—my way of saying thank you."

ON HIS FIRST WORKDAY AT HOME FOLLOWING his latest success, there is one undebatable truth: John Adams is in demand. The telephone rings constantly, echoing in discordant tones from the rear of the

clusive contract with Nonesuch Records, granting that company recording options on any new compositions. Boosey & Hawkes Inc., of New York and London, publishes his scores. A representative of the California Artists Management agency handles his domestic appearances, and an English agent books overseas commitments.

Adams' recordings invariably make the top-10 classical listings. Despite a \$50 price tag, "Nixon in China" has sold into the five-figure range, quite a feat for a modern opera. His music is played all over the world; his fanfare for orchestra, "Short Ride in a Fast Machine," has been performed more than 150 times. Dance companies as diverse as the Dance Theater of Harlem and the New York City Ballet have choreographed his works. "And every piece I write gets recorded. For me that's of paramount importance," he emphasizes.

Such productivity has not protected Adams' music from the most dogged criticism: its accessibility. In popular culture, the creation of music that can be understood and appreciated with limited effort results in celebration as well as profit. But in the insulated—to Adams, "inbred"—world of serious music, such an attitude is anathema. Since Viennese composer Arnold Schoenberg revolutionized contemporary music with his 12-tone system of composition in the 1920s, many composers have joined ranks with atonality. One rigorously atonal composer, New Yorker Charles Wuorinen, has condemned the music of minimalists as "unchallenging" and "unprovocative." Adams has responded by calling Wuorinen "a square" and "the Patrick Buchanan of serious music."

"I'm delighted to maybe be the first composer for whom the crisis of accessibility is a major philosophical issue," Adams says. "It conjures up all sorts of awful things, like compromise of one's loftiness, searching for audiences, placating audiences, designing a work of art with an audience in mind, all of which are wrong and have nothing to do with me. I write for no one except myself. I'm very suspicious of contemporary music. I think that a lot of it is written by people who are really cowards, who fear that if they don't write in a certain mode, their colleagues will not see them as important."

Adams' stance has helped to break down one popular notion of the artist as an antagonist, a critic of society who lives apart and struggles anonymously, suffering for his art. "These things happen," he concedes. "But the problem is that for a composer, it's now required that his art arrive difficult, incomprehensible, thorny, bristling, full of a need for exegeses and explanation. One of my criticisms with contemporary music is that its obsession with purity has brought about a sterility."

"What I think is the most wonderful aspect of American culture," he continues, "is that we are a culture with very few dividing lines. I grew up in a household where Benny Goodman and Mozart were not separated."

LISTENING TO RECORDS IS AMONG ADAMS' earliest childhood recollections. "I had a game with my father," he recalls, "where I would listen to Bozo the Clown conducting circus marches, or a Jimmy Dorsey record, and as each instrument took a solo, I would pretend to play that instrument. I was 4 at the time."

Adams was born in Worcester, Mass., 45 miles west of Boston, and raised in Vermont and in New Hampshire, where his grandfather had built a dance hall on Lake Winnipesaukee. His mother ("a gifted contralto with no training") sang for the house band, while his father ("not quite a good" clarinetist/saxophonist) played in a touring band. They eloped in 1936.

Adams believes that his parents recognized early on that he was a musical prodigy. "My daughter has exceptional musical talent, and you see that immediately. When she was 4 years old, she would twist the radio dial until she heard violins, every time we got in the car. So she was taking violin by the time she was 4. Now she's 7

Richard Stayton is a free-lance writer and playwright whose last story for the magazine was about impresario Reza Abdo.



house. Calls to his unlisted number reach no taped message. And for now, Adams ignores the ringing in a calm display of self-discipline. "The curse of being in California are those New Yorkers," he says. "It's 8 o'clock and your tabula rasa is clean, when all of a sudden there's some New Yorker who's had eight cups of coffee and has dealt with the subway and a rude office boy, and, by God, he's calling you to get an answer."

Although Adams prefers to work "banker's hours," tries to avoid composing at night and attempts to keep weekends free for his family, his expanding career makes such a schedule difficult. For example, in 1988 and 1989, he conducted for the L.A. Philharmonic, London's Royal Philharmonic, the Edinburgh Festival, Chicago's Grant Park Concerts and the Orchestra of St. Luke's, among others. He also found time to occupy the creative chair of the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra, where he conducted three subscription weeks and one new-music concert. Although Adams ranks among an exclusive handful of serious composers who can make a living solely from composing, he continues to conduct to achieve a better balance between the introverted isolation of creation and the extroversion of performance. Then, too, conducting fees far exceed the royalties on a composition's performance.

"I realize I'm running a small business now," he says. "I've got publications to proofread, tons of faxes to answer and conducting programs to make out—and the recording of 'Klinghoffer,' which is just staggeringly expensive and complicated to schedule."

"Small" may be underestimating it. Adams has an ex-

and plays Vivaldi. And she writes her own pieces."

Enthusiastically, Adams glides out of the room, returning with a sheet of music notated painstakingly. "I came home from a trip and she'd written this, which is a real piece; it isn't just notes all over. I said, 'Well, it's very beautiful, Emily. It's very sad, all in G minor. What's the name of it?' And she said, 'The Death of Klinghoffer,' of course."

Adams remembers while in the fifth grade taking walks in the woods, composing imagined symphonies. By the sixth grade, he was playing clarinet in an amateur orchestra sponsored by the New Hampshire State Mental Hospital—a mixture, he says, of "well-meaning local professionals" and "very intelligent, skillful, absolutely wild-card mental patients."

This strange episode gave Adams his first insight into music's power to transform humans beings: "I remember the odor of a not-very-well-ventilated gym, perhaps in the middle of wintertime in New Hampshire, filled with 2,000 mental patients. We'd be playing the most banal piece of music, and I'd look out and see four or five people in the front row with tears running down their faces. My music has always been that way, and I think that's why it threatens so many people. My music is emotionally committed."

By the age of 13, Adams had written and conducted a suite for string orchestra. His parents would drive him to Boston and back for weekly clarinet lessons. He never had formal piano lessons, "much to my regret." But his talents earned him a scholarship to Harvard, where he majored in composition.

His most influential professor was composer Leon Kirchner. Adams was among the few undergraduates Kirchner permitted into his graduate composition seminar. "Already you saw the characteristics of original turns of mind," Kirchner says of Adams. "But I didn't believe he was really interested in composition. He was an excellent conductor and a very gifted clarinetist. I thought he'd make his way in the performance world."

Having been reared where jazz and classical music coexisted without prejudice, Adams found tradition-bound Harvard claustrophobic. "The music department started with the Gregorian chant and ended with Webern. . . . There was no discussion of jazz. Jazz was not considered a real art form. But we were all going back to our rooms and getting high and listening to Cecil Taylor and [John] Coltrane and the Rolling Stones."

Through recordings, Adams grew aware of music from India and other "exotic" forms. "It struck me as ironic that there was so much feeling in rock—that rock expressed our Dionysian side, expressed our spiritual side, expressed our sexual side, and our convivial, social side, but in the serious contemporary music that I was being taught, feeling had become extremely refined and so restrained and so sublimated and so complicated. Right from 1967 I knew that I was leading a double life, and that it was dishonest."

The late 1960s, even at staid Harvard, left their mark on those music majors. "I took LSD. I had some trips that changed me in a very good direction," he remembers. Adams endured two years of graduate school, which he's labeled "a malignant cocoon." In 1971, he graduated with a master's degree and the usual Harvard programming for his next steps: to wander through Europe before returning to pursue a Ph.D. in composition.

But, instead, he packed up a VW and drove to California, prompted in part by his parents' graduation gift, a copy of John Cage's "Silence: Lectures and Writings," a book imbued with both Zen and transcendental philosophies. "I knew there was some activity in the avant-garde here," he says. "It just seemed like the right place to me. And I think I was right."

**WHAT KIND OF WORK DOES THE RECENTLY graduated, serious contemporary music scholar find? In Adams' case, society rewarded him with a year's employment in warehouses on the Oakland waterfront,**

where he unloaded crates of Bermuda shorts for Sears Roebuck and became dispirited and exhausted.

Then "a total fluke" changed his life. On the verge of returning to Harvard "and becoming a proper professor," he saw that the San Francisco Conservatory of Music was advertising for a music teacher. "Little more than an accordion academy at the time," he says, the conservatory nevertheless had a provocative history of having supported the avant-garde. Adams was made head of its new-music program. For the next 10 years the conservatory served as his musical laboratory.

Jon Bailey, now director of the Gay Men's Chorus in Los Angeles and a music teacher at Pomona College, was dean of the conservatory at the time. He remembers the 25-year-old Adams as "quiet but intense—not way out on the fringes of things but asking lots and lots of questions about the nature of music." Among the pieces Adams composed was one commissioned by Bailey. Titled "Ktaadn," the composition for piano and chorus premiered in 1972 at the University of California Art Museum in Berkeley. "Some in the audience started hissing and booing against the polite applause," Bailey says. "John just loved it."

At the conservatory, Adams experimented with John Cage-like indeterminacy (compositions where instrumental choices are made in part through chance). He obsessively explored electronic music and finally designed and built his own synthesizer. Tape music, sound-texts and the influence of minimalist composer Reich led Adams to what he calls a "diatonic conversion."

At Harvard, he says, he had been dogmatically taught that tonality was dead—that atonal, highly rationalized scores were the only true serious music of our time. Schoenberg's heirs, the serialists, were reducing melody, harmony, rhythm and timbre to mathematical formulas. But in 1976, the year that Glass' opera "Einstein on the Beach" crowned minimalism as postmodernism's theme music, Adams became convinced, as a result of his synthesizer experiments, that long-sustained harmonies and quick modulations were his musical language. Minimalism, he realized, was the perfect musical mirror of the vast California landscape.

In 1977 Adams composed "Phrygian Gates"

## **In the controversial 'Death of Klinghoffer,' terrorist Rambo (left) confronts Leon Klinghoffer (middle) and his choreographic double.**

for piano; in 1978, "Shaker Loops" for string septet. These pieces were—and at the same time were not—strictly minimalist. The repetitive Glassian patterns were interrupted by impassioned climaxes. The San Francisco Symphony's music director, Edo de Waart, offered Adams a position as composer-in-residence in 1978. Out of that evolved a purely Adams invention, the New and Unusual Music Series. Structured to lure audiences his own age into the concert hall, it became the model for the popular Meet the Composer Orchestra Residency programs across the country.

In 1982, the National Endowment for the Arts, Exxon Corp. and the Rockefeller Foundation made Adams their first composer-in-residence grantee. And more significantly, the San Francisco Symphony provided him with a composer's favorite toy: a major orchestra. He was commissioned to write a full-scale orchestral piece to celebrate the inaugural season of the Louise M. Davies Hall. Adams seized the opportunity in ambitious style, explaining to the San Francisco Examiner that, "I went for broke. I didn't write just a little piece, I wrote a monster

for a 150-voice, 100-piece orchestra." The recording of that composition, "Harmonium," earned a Grammy nomination.

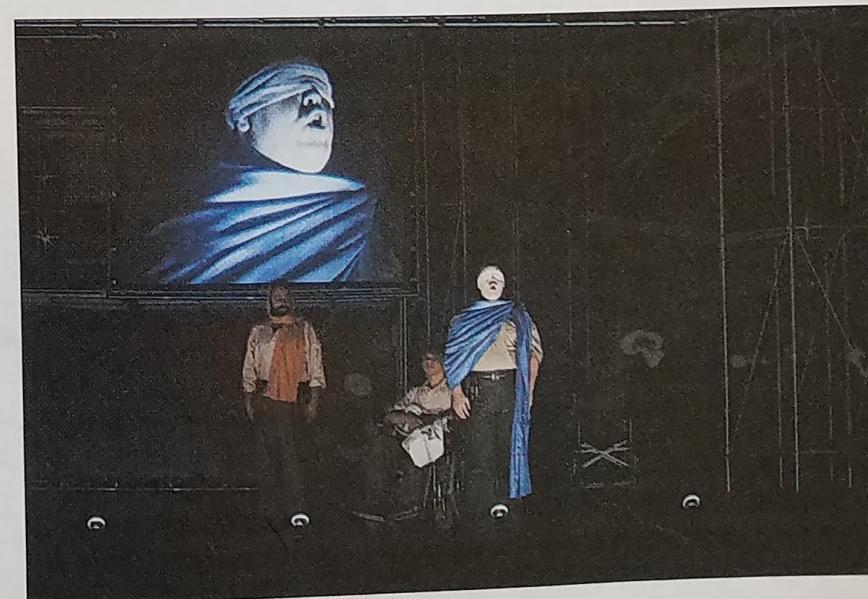
More grants, commissions and notoriety ensued. In 1982, Beverly Hills arts patron Betty Freeman was introduced to Adams' music by Reich, and in November, she invited Adams to perform at one of her influential Sunday musicales. His music, she says, is "exciting and intelligent and humorous and ironic."

Another significant contact occurred while Adams was in New England at a performance of his "Shaker Loops." There he met an intense, younger Harvard graduate, Peter Sellars. "I saw in Peter a person who really understood music," Adams recalls. "That's rare, unfortunately, among opera directors." The *Wunderkinder* discussed collaborating on the Super Bowl of serious music, a grand opera. Sellars suggested Richard Milhouse Nixon as a subject. Adams was quite skeptical.

In 1983, secure with his composer-in-residence salary of \$40,000, Adams married Bay Area landscape photographer and arts administrator O'Grady. Thus, Adams had everything a contemporary music composer could want—growing prestige, financial security, a supportive marriage, a commission for his next orchestral composition—plus a profound creative block.

Today he is matter-of-fact about the two-year dry spell: "I got blocked because I thought maybe I was doing the wrong thing, and life ought to be more complicated." He sought out a Jungian psychiatrist, Dr. John Beebe, widely known for helping artists with creative paralysis. Through therapy, Adams realized he was suffering the burden of fame. Since "Harmonium," his reputation was generating expectations of another minimalist masterpiece. But he felt like "a minimalist who is bored with minimalism." In Jungian terms, his "feeling function" was being intimidated by the "thinking function." In the midst of intense therapy, he experienced a breakthrough dream in which he witnessed a tanker launched out of San Francisco Bay like a rocket. The next morning he sat at his piano and pounded out "these huge E-minor chords." His block was broken.

Adams had found his distinctive voice. It wasn't purely minimalist. He wanted emotional self-expression, not intellectual purity. Even the title of his breakthrough



work, "Harmonielehre," was lifted from Schoenberg's 1911 landmark treatise of the same name. *Fin de siècle* composers, from Debussy to Sibelius to Mahler, were lyrically "filtered" through the work. "Harmonielehre" is about revelation and healing. Music is a means of getting myself and my listener in touch with our deepest selves, like the people in that state hospital." "Harmonielehre," a sensation, was nominated for a Pulitzer

*Continued on Page 34*

## John Adams

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Prize. And Adams had already embarked on the most ambitious project of his career. Two years of gestation had transformed Sellars' opera: "Nixon in China" would not be a satire. It would be a grand opera about "the myths of our time, which are not Cupid and Psyche or Orpheus or Ulysses but characters like Mao and Nixon." This first major opera based on a living figure in history would, as critic Mark Swed wrote, "not be about what Nixon did for China, but what China did to Nixon." Adams requested that the libretto of fellow Harvard alumnus Alice Goodman be poetry; she delivered eloquent rhyming couplets.

After extensive research, Adams penciled "Nixon in China" at the top of a blank page. Two years later, in 1985, the score was premiered at the Houston Grand Opera. "No opera by an American has ever been awaited with such excitement," wrote Michael Steinberg in *Connoisseur*.

Some critics accused the creative team of "glitzy populism," but "Nixon in China" became the most popular modern opera of the 1980s, presented by the Brooklyn Academy of Music (for its Next Wave Festival), the Kennedy Center, the Netherlands Opera in Amsterdam and the Edinburgh Festival, among others. An international TV broadcast added to its reputation. (Adams dislikes the PBS version partly because, he says, Walter Cronkite, as the commentator, mispronounces numerous operatic terms.)

However, not until last year at the L.A. Music Center, during the opera's seventh staging, did Adams feel that "Nixon in China" had found its ideal form. That's because Sellars needed the many incarnations of "Nixon" to refine the staging for the third act's contrapuntal music. There, Adams' dark, introspective score—far more complex than the first two acts—finally took stage shape. Not only did the new setting (the weary world leaders' private bedrooms) make a perfect scenic match for Adams' music, but it also inspired the composer with ideas for a new opera score that would offer still deeper musical experience.

Feeling "somewhat burned-out," Adams fled with his family to Rome, "hid out" and struggled to compose again in the vein of that last ambitious act of "Nixon." Yet, what emerged was "this ridiculous eight-bar phrase that was so square, almost like a figure from a rock or pop tune." Through analysis, Adams had learned to "embrace the beast, no matter how perverse." Adams has a name for this side of his creative personality: the Trickster, "the garish, ironic wild card."

The result, "Fearful Symmetries," is a work Adams adores, even though it has infuriated many of his followers. He jokes that its subtitle might be "Libertine in Hell." Its unapologetic use of the

American vernacular (wailing saxophones, boogie-woogie, funk, lunatic strings) has driven many reviewers into hyperbolic scorn.

But the somber side of Adams is clearly in evidence in a recent piece, "The Wound-Dresser," an adaptation of Walt Whitman's poem about nursing wounded Civil War soldiers. Adams' late father, ill with Alzheimer's disease, had been nursed at home by his mother. "Nursing is such an immensely important activity in a human life," Adams says, "and yet it's something that's so uncelebrated. To me, it's the ultimate relationship between two human beings."

The extraordinary simplicity and emotional clarity of "The Wound-Dresser"—a solo violin hovering above elegiac baritone Sanford Sylvan, a distant military trumpet—prepared the stage for Adams' monumental opera about suffering and redemption, "The Death of Klinghoffer." The same team that mounted "Nixon" went back to work, this time financed through an unprecedented six-company co-production arrangement.

Again, a group of Americans abroad was confronted by a culture they did not understand. "On one level, 'Klinghoffer' is an exploration of the theme of sickness and healing," Adams says. This time, however, he was reacting to a phrase he'd read that horrified him: Americans in the wake of AIDS and the homeless were suffering from "compassion fatigue." Adams found such a phrase to be a revolting cover-up for a terribly sick national psyche.

**OUR CONVERSATION IS DISRUPTED** as a breathless Deborah O'Grady charges into the house. "The money spigots have all been turned on," she announces. "Money is just pouring out onto the ground." Adams' wife explains that, to fight off a last-second counter-bid for their new house, ever-greater financial stability had to be shown. Now every penny they possess is flooding into the house account.

This is nothing, she laughs, compared to the 18-month war of "Klinghoffer." At home, she says, even the two children—Emily and Sam, 5—were drafted into the opera's creation. "Everyone had to sacrifice time, help out around the house and understand that John had to withdraw from normal activity for 'Klinghoffer.'"

But Adams returns the attention. He proudly points to the framed paintings on the parlor wall. On close inspection, you discover they're California landscapes photographed by his wife. "The ongoing theme in our house is the degradation of the environment," he says. "My wife has done a lot of photographic work in the delta, which is very flat and very wide. This experience of California is one reason why all of my pieces are large-scale, big canvases."

Adams' next composition is ecologically themed. An orchestral work commissioned by the San Francisco Symphony, "El Dorado" will premier

this fall and has been scheduled by the L.A. Philharmonic for next year.

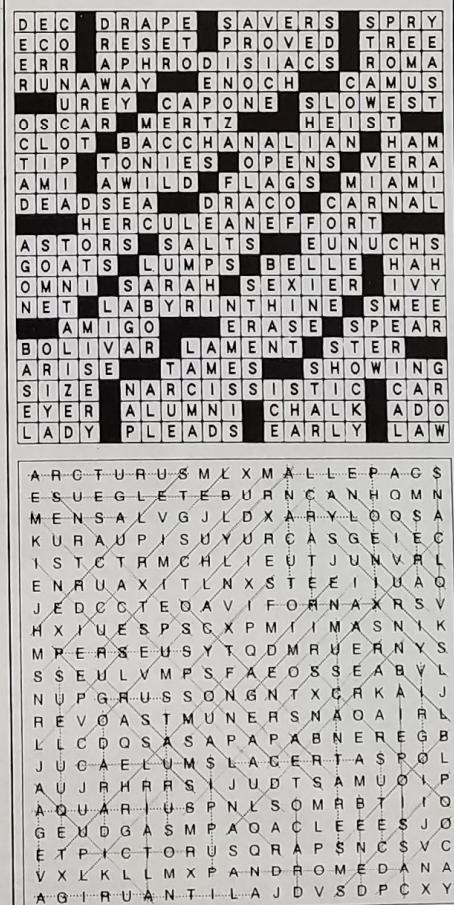
"L.A. has been better to me than [San Francisco] or New York or anywhere," he says. "There's some reason I've always gotten a warm, enthusiastic response there. The Philharmonic has a history of doing unusual programming. And Betty [Freeman] is there."

Adams is resisting the many financial temptations coming his way in the wake of "Klinghoffer." Yes, he gets offers to score films—"Money is no object," he's been told by Hollywood producers, which, to Adams, implies that "quality is no object, either." He's eliminating non-composing opportunities, even to the extent of having returned advance monies for a BBC series about American music. "I just decided that at this point in my life, I really wanted to write more music, not become a Leonard Bernstein," he says.

And what about a third opera? Adams stares off into space and slumps back into the chair. For the first time he reveals signs of jet lag. "There's already discussion of another opera in the works," he says, "but I think I'm going to wait for two years. I think '95 sounds about right. I'll probably work with Peter, but it may be interesting to work with a different text, a different approach to language."

"I view composing as a means of assimilating the very, very complex life that I and everyone else around me live, especially as Americans," he says, speaking intensely now. "The difference between me and most of my modernist friends is that they're still busy trying to screen out the outside world and refine their experience into something very pure. And I'm doing just the opposite. I'm trying to embrace as much of it as I can."

### Solutions to last week's Puzzler



Continued from Page 15

been introduced to revoke or add conditions to the renewal of China's most-favored-nation status, including the demand that China cease exporting *lao-gai-dui* products. Separate actions also have been taken to strengthen and broaden the law banning imports of convict-made goods.

The President has made clear his support of no-strings-attached trade benefits: "Some critics have said revoke MFN or endanger it with sweeping conditions," he told the graduating class at Yale on May 26. "This advice is . . . not in the best interest of our country . . . and in the end . . . it is not moral."

If Congress passes a joint resolution, and the President vetoes it—as it appears he would—Congress must come up with a two-thirds majority to make conditions stick. Most observers say such an override would be unlikely.

Even if Congress endorses the President's recommendation, there is another wrinkle: A Palo Alto-based group called Support Democracy in China is promoting a boycott of toys made in China. The so-called "toycott" has targeted one of China's biggest exports in an effort to protest not just the forced-labor camps but the full list of Chinese human-rights abuses.

"The United States," says Linda Pfeifer, legislative liaison for SDC, "is the single-largest importer of toys from China. Fifty-five percent of all the dolls sold here, and 40% of all other toys, are manufactured there. The Chinese government made \$1.6 billion in toy exports during the first six months of 1990 alone. Toys have become their largest export item."

The toys mean billions of dollars for America's retailers. The U.S. toy industry has lobbied hard—and emotionally—to uphold China's trade status. At last year's MFN hearings, for example, one executive went so far as to say that China could never be denied MFN status because if it were, the price of Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle toys would quickly become prohibitive.

Last November, SDC passed out more than 50,000 flyers in front of Toys "R" Us stores nationwide. For the 1990 holiday season, the company reported an unprecedented 6% decline in profits. Pfeifer thinks her flyers had something to do with the result.

Pfeifer hopes that the toy boycott will send a strong message to Beijing: American consumers won't let their children cuddle dolls that may be made by convict labor. She also hopes that soon all business relations with China will be seen as tarnishing to a company's image—as was trade with South Africa just a few years ago.

"We met with David Miller, president of the Toy Manufacturers of America," Pfeifer says. "We met with Michael Goldstein, the vice president of Toys "R" Us. Our request was that they divest from China."

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ing step by completing cross-equity purchases with two well-regarded international airlines: Swissair and Singapore Airlines Ltd. In addition to buying shares in each other's companies, the three have initiated cooperative programs in marketing, promotions and flight-attendant training.

Closer to home, Delta has demonstrated a razor-sharp edge in California that prompts Bear, Stearns & Co. analyst Thomas Longman to conclude that "Delta is getting more aggressive." Last June, Delta muscled into the overcrowded shuttle market between the L.A. Basin and the Bay Area.

Squared off against United, American and USAir Group's USAir, Delta inaugurated service with an attention-grabbing promotional round-trip fare of \$190. United returned the volley a few months later by dropping its price to \$128. Both USAir and American blinked, and began to pull back. Then, last January, Southwest Airlines crashed the party by announcing a \$40 round-trip fare on its Ontario to Oakland flight. Today it costs \$59 to fly from L.A. to the Bay Area, and Delta brags that it's the only carrier to serve free California wine.

EVERY DAY, DELTA EMPLOYEES are reminded of their company's triumph over Eastern as they wend their way from Delta's campus-like offices at the Atlanta airport past the mournful sight of dozens of unsold Eastern planes parked nose-by-tail near deserted hangars. The journey could be a metaphor for the entire industry.

When Congress cut the airlines loose from stringent regulation, managements accustomed to bucking critical decisions on fares and routes to the Civil Aeronautics Board suddenly had to solve problems themselves. Some tried to expand so fast they outgrew their ability to manage and sank. Shaky high-cost airlines that matched the bargains of low-cost newcomers sometimes ended up underpricing themselves into bankruptcy. Lean-and-mean managements learned to stand firm against union demands, but not without resentment that spilled over onto travelers and helped push a few airlines into liquidation.

What many managers learned too late is that running a big airline is one of the toughest jobs around. This cyclical industry tracks the ups and downs of the economy in almost perfect synchronization, which means bad

times regularly depress earnings. Yet capital expenditures are astronomical; a new Boeing 747 jumbo jet costs as much as \$140 million. Furthermore, the product airlines sell is exquisitely perishable. A carrier has only one chance to sell a seat on a plane. It can't be put into inventory. Thus every empty space costs something in foregone revenue. Add to this high-priced labor expenditures that are tough to cut. Finally, the industry's health often rests on events out of management's control—the Gulf War or rotten weather or a rash of hijackings. To succeed, management must plan for stability during harsh economic times.

There is no doubt that Delta is strengthened by Eastern's eclipse. One of the many goodies Delta picked up from Eastern is the designation as "Official Airline to Disney World and Disneyland." Today at Walt Disney World Resort's Magic Kingdom in Orlando, children squeal with delight as swirling seats transport them through a captivating Delta exhibition on the history of aviation called "Dreamflight."

More important than Mickey Mouse is the virtual monopoly that Delta has at the Atlanta airport. Northwest is pondering whether to establish an Atlanta presence. But analysts believe the cost of building a base capable of challenging Delta could be daunting to any airline.

Analysts are divided on the question of buying Delta stock. Riding the euphoria that has pushed the Dow-Jones Industrial Average up more than 450 points this year, Delta's stock climbed to about \$70 a share in late May, from \$56 in January.

Stephen Leeb, president of Money Growth Institute in New Jersey, is bullish. "By the middle of next year, the strong carriers—American, Delta and United—will be recovering at a furious pace. Of the three, Delta has the most potential."

In Atlanta, Delta managers are fastening their seat belts for recovery in a downsized industry, and Ron Allen likes the outlook. "I feel we are in for a good year," he says. President Hawkins eyes a bonanza further out: the 1996 Atlanta Olympics. Delta toiled hard to help win that prize for the city. Hawkins says the carrier won't find out until 1992 whether it will be the games' official airline. But it's tough to imagine that treasure eluding Delta's grasp. After all, the airline's name is the fourth letter in the Greek alphabet—the language of the original Olympians.

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**Los Angeles Times**

# STYLE

## DESIGN

# Palace of the People

**W**hen designer Tony Duquette and his assistant, Hutton Wilkinson, first glimpsed St. John the Baptist Catholic Church in Baldwin Park, it was a sterile, barn-like building. Wilkinson described the 1940s structure as a "concrete bunker, all gray and Naughahyde" and dubbed it "Mussolini Modern." There was nothing of the richness or ceremony of churches in Mexico and the Philippines, the homelands of many of the parishioners. But Father Peter Nugent, then St. John's pastor, had seen Duquette's work and asked the Tony-winning artist (he designed "Camelot") if he could improve the church. Duquette gladly accepted, saying, "I am always trying to bring a sense of pageantry to people's lives."

Using a warm coral and gold palette, just as he had for the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion auditorium, Duquette made the story of St. John his decorative theme. The tapestries and altar cloth, inspired by St. John's wanderings in the desert, were made from shreds of wool and burlap stitched to hessian netting. For the chandeliers, Duquette shaped the arms to resemble water from the fountain of the baptism splashing heavenward.

Duquette also decorated two side chapels—one for Our Lady of Perpetual Help, a favorite saint of the Filipinos, and another for Our Lady of Guadalupe, the patron saint of Mexico. Volunteers from the congregation painted the walls coral and the ceiling gold and refinished the pews.

Finished in 1983 but never photographed for publication until now, the church joins a select group of religious interiors created by artists, including the Matisse Chapel in France and Luis Barragan's convent and chapel in Mexico. It is one of the most poetic of L.A.'s ecclesiastical interiors, and, in Duquette's words, "a palace of the people."

—TIM STREET-PORTER

Coral and gold warm the interior of St. John the Baptist Catholic Church, right. One of two rich-hued chapels is devoted to Our Lady of Guadalupe, left. The font, above, consists of a real clam shell, supported by fragments of metal gates welded together.



Photographed by Tim Street-Porter

# Opern-Journal

## Ein Medieneignis

### «The Death of Klinghoffer» von John Adams wurde in Brüssel uraufgeführt Von Imre Fabian

Der amerikanische Komponist John Adams ist ein exponierter Vertreter des musikalischen Journalismus, seine Opernthemen findet er in tagespolitischen Ereignissen. Im Musikalischen pflegt er einen unverbindlichen Konversationsstil ohne den Hörer strapazierenden Tiefgang. Seine erste Oper, «Nixon in China», brachte den historischen Besuch des amerikanischen Präsidenten auf die Opernbühne. Sie war, schon wegen des Sujets, ein gefundenes Fressen für die Medien, vor allem in der attraktiven Aufbereitung des Regisseurs Peter Sellars, der sich diesmal in seinem eigentlichen Element befand.

In seinem zweiten Stück für das Musiktheater griff Adams den Überfall arabischer Terroristen auf das Kreuzfahrtschiff «Achille Lauro» und die Ermordung des im Rollstuhl gefesselten amerikanischen Passagiers Leon Klinghoffer auf, Alice Goodman schuf dazu das Libretto. Die Brüsseler Uraufführung zog eine noch nie dagewesene Schar von Fernsehreportern und Musikjournalisten aus aller Welt an, Hausherr Gérard Mortier durfte ob der großen internationalen Werbekampagne für sein Theater strahlen. Ein Medieneignis, wie es im Buche steht. Die Opernhäuser in Brüssel, Lyon, San Francisco, das Glyndebourne und das Los Angeles Festival und die Brooklyn Academy of Music haben sich zusammengetan, um mit vereinten Kräften das Medienspektakel zu ermöglichen. Nun ließe sich sagen, daß Medieneignisse nur zufällig auch künstlerische sind, weil die Interessen der Medien in erster Linie nicht künstlerischer Natur sind. Der zweite Wurf von Adams landete auf den Bildschirmen und in den Schlagzeilen der internationalen Presse, in der Operngeschichte unseres Jahrhunderts einen Platz einzunehmen, diese Ambition hat Adams sicherlich nicht.

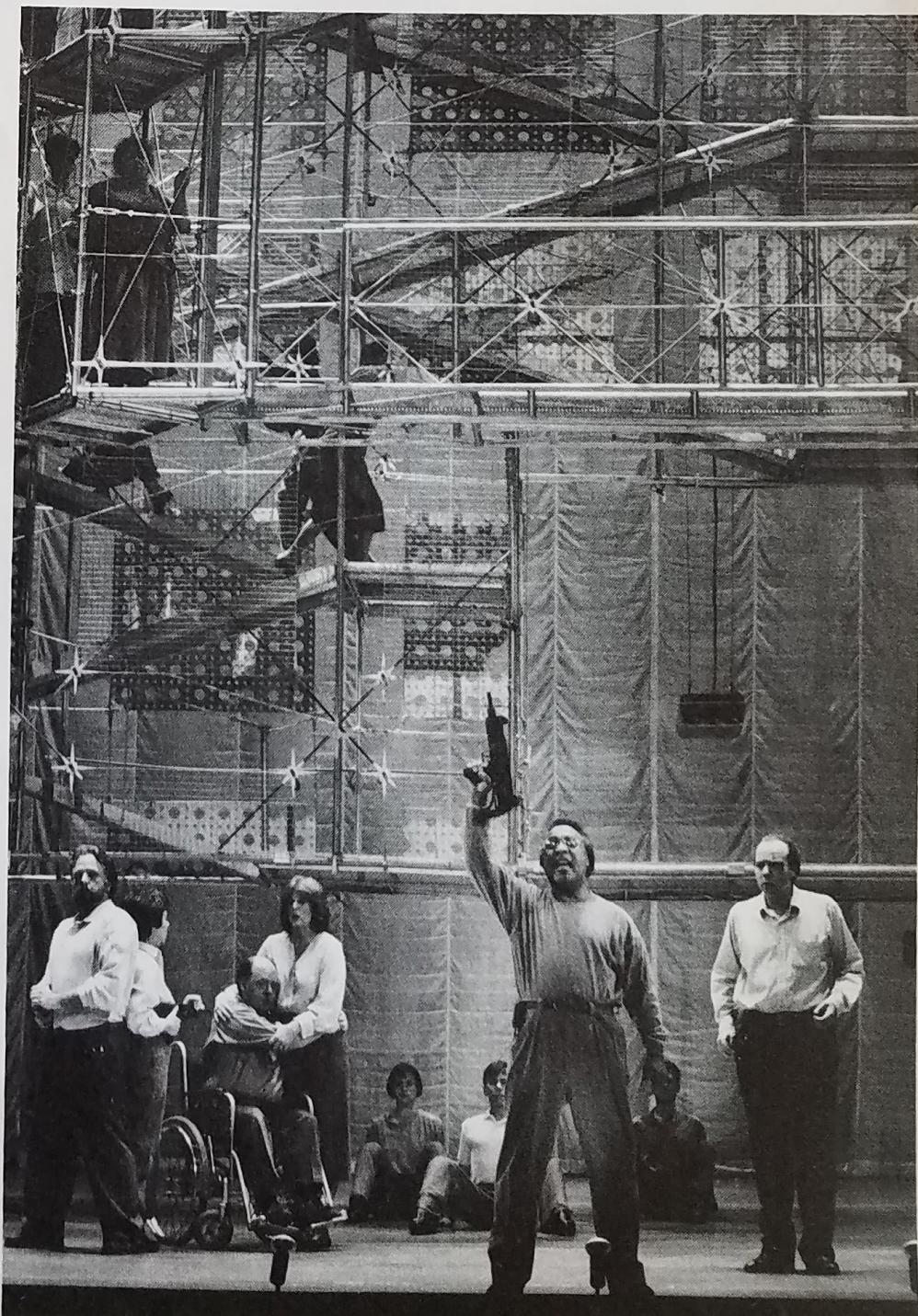
«Klinghoffers Tod» ist ein eher nachdenkliches Stück und nicht die dramatische Darstellung einer Entführung, eine Meditation über Gewalt und ihre Ursachen, über Täter und Opfer, die – für den Zuschauer etwas verwirrend – auch auf der Bühne ihre Rollen wechseln. Vom Aktionismus, der journalistischen Geschwätzigkeit seiner ersten Oper hat sich Adams in «Klinghoffer» distanziert und schlägt einen pseudophilosophischen Ton an. Die dürftige Substanz des Orchestersatzes mit seinen enerzierenden Motiv-Wiederholungen, der Funktion von klanglichen Grundierungen, das gelegentliche Ausbreiten eines Klangteppichs, die Kontrastlosigkeit der vokalen Parts, der seicht-pathetische Grundton mit vorgetäuschten Tiefsinn könnten Adams als Musical-Komponisten ausweisen, wenn er ein dramaturgisch griffigeres Stück in die Hände bekäme. Die Aktionslosigkeit versuchte Regisseur Peter Sellars, der in der Personenregie seine handwerkliche Virtuosität diesmal nur bedingt entfalten konnte, mit Bewegungsschören zu beleben, ihre Collage-Gymnastik wirkte gelegentlich peinlich, trotz des Choreographen

Mark Morris. Die Solisten boten gute, eindrucksvolle Leistungen. Ihre sängerischen Qualitäten konnte man bei der geballten Technik einer riesigen Batterie an Verstärkern, die der zarten Stimme eines

Kanarienvogels spielend das Volumen einer singulären Brünnhilde verleihen könnten, kaum zu beurteilen. James Maddalena (Kapitän), Sanford Sylvan (Klinghoffer), Sheila Nadler (Marilyn Klinghoffer), Eugene Perry (Mamoud), Thomas Young (Molqi), Stephanie Friedman (Omar) behaupteten sich u.a. als vorzügliche Sänger-Schauspieler. Die karge Bühne, ein schlichtes Stahlgerüst, entwarf George Tsypin, für die Kostüme zeichnete Dunya Ramicova verantwortlich. Hervorragend der von Johannes Mikkelsen einstudierte Chor.

Kent Nagano hielt mit imponierender Partiturkenntnis und großem Engagement den Aufführungsapparat souverän zusammen. Er setzte sich sehr eindrucksvoll für ein zeitgenössisches Stück ein, was dessen Qualitäten betrifft, allem Anschein über jeden Zweifel erhaben.

JOHN ADAMS: «THE DEATH OF KLINGHOFFER». Libretto: Alice Goodman; Uraufführung am 19. März, besuchte Vorstellung am 2. April 1991; Dirigent: Kent Nagano; Regie: Peter Sellars; Choreographie: Mark Morris; Bühne: George Tsypin; Kostüme: Dunya Ramicova; Beleuchtung: James F. Ingalls; Sounddesigner: Jonathan Deans. Solisten: Stephanie Friedman (Alma Rumor/Omar), Thomas Young (Jonathan Rumor/Molqi), Sanford Sylvan (Harry Rumor/Klinghoffer), James Maddalena (Kapitän), Eugene Perry (Mamoud), Thomas Hammons (Rambo) u.a.



Brüssel: Szene aus der Uraufführung von John Adams' «The Death of Klinghoffer» in Brüssel – Foto Baus-Mattar

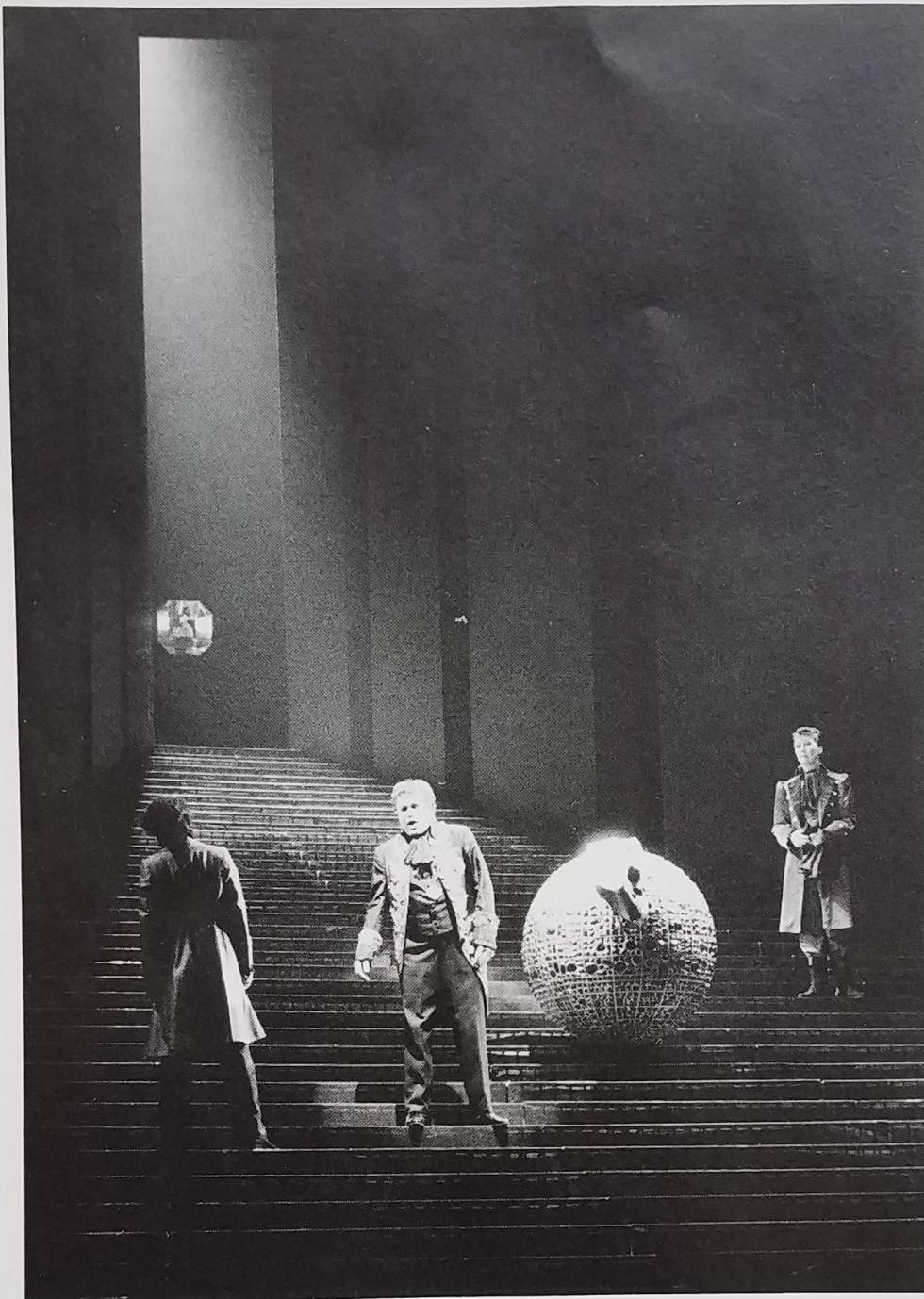
# Panorama

Wien (Staatsoper): Mozart, «Titus»

„Im Geschwindmarsch durch die Geschichte“

Die letzte Premiere, die Claus Helmut Drese in seiner zu Ende gehenden Direktionszeit selbst inszenierte, hinterließ nicht ganz den geschlossenen Eindruck, den man dem scheidenden Hausherrn aus diesem Anlaß gern gegönnt hätte. Das gilt für den musikalischen Aspekt ebenso wie für den szenischen. Was diesen betrifft, so scheint hier gerade das Bestreben, Einheitlichkeit durch eine optische Konstante zu erzwingen, eben diesem Eindruck nicht förderlich gewesen zu sein.

Es ist ja schön, wenn sich für ein Opernwerk eine allen fiktiven Schauplätzen übergeordnete Raumidee finden läßt. Die große, nach oben sich verjüngende (also perspektivisch gesteigerte) Treppe, die Hans Schavernoch für diese «Clemenza di Tito» baute, machte fürs erste guten Effekt, erwies sich eher als ein Regie-Korsett, das die freiere Bewegung beengte. Dabei war der Ansatz klug durchdacht. Die Treppe als Symbol des Weges der Herrschaft, zur absoluten hinauf, zum Volk herunter, ließ zunächst als Zielpunkt eine Art Kronschatz (wie in einer Ausstellungsvitrine) erkennen. Und tatsächlich wurde auch der Anlaß, für den Mozart die Oper geschaffen hatte, die Krönung Kaiser Leopolds II. in Prag, gleichsam mitinszeniert: Während der Marcia zum ersten Auftritt des Titus von oben wurde ihm die Krone aufs Haupt gesetzt, und um die Sache noch deutlicher zu machen, erschien der römische Imperator hier im Galakleid der Zeit Leopolds (d.h. auch Mozarts). Lore Haas schwelgte mit ihren Kostümen aber nicht bloß in solch prächtiger Historie; wenn dann die Aufständischen in heutigem Feldgrau die Treppe hinaufstiegen, also dorthin, wo das Capitol anzunehmen ist, und Kaiser Titus zum zweiten Finale unten in Hemdsärmeln erscheint, so wird uns bedeutet, daß die Zeit inzwischen fortgeschritten ist und der aufgeklärte Souverän im Geschwindmarsch durch die Ge-



**Treppe, Mauern – zweimal Mozarts «Titus»: Oben eine Szene aus der Aufführung an der Wiener Staatsoper mit (von links) Gabriele Sima als Annio, Dénes Gulyás in der Titelpartie und Ann Murray als Sesto (Foto Zeininger). Unten das Ensemble der Produktion dieser Oper am Pfalztheater Kaiserslautern (Foto Hans Schenkel).**



schichte das Terrain der modernen Demokratie bereits betreten hat.

Im zweiten Akt ist die Treppe in ihrem unteren Teil «abgebrandelt» und breiig geschmolzen, als wäre sie aus Kunststoff. Das Symbolhafte wird realistisch durchkreuzt. Und da diese Brandstätte, die auch dem Sextus als Karzer dient, zum Finale der gepriesenen Mildtätigkeit nicht recht passen will, erscheint wie ein Deus ex machina ein Mittelding von Zwischenvorhang und Hintergrundprospekt über der Treppe, ein kitschpostkartenähnlicher Wolkenhimmel im Abendlicht. Wer erfahren will, welcher Künste der Bühnenbildner Schavernoch fähig ist, muß etwas weitergehen zu den «Freudiana» ins Theater an der Wien, wo seine Zauberei mit Spiegelfolien und Laserlicht die eigentliche Hauptattraktion bildet.

Die Musik war bei Sylvain Cambreling, der in der Wiener Staatsoper debütierte, in den Händen eines erfahrenen Sachwalters, wobei dieses Wort eben auch die Sachlichkeit seines Umgangs mit der Partitur treffen möchte; bisweilen hörte sich das an, als wolle der Dirigent kühlen Kopfes zu dramatischer Heißblütigkeit finden. Die musikalisch führenden Kräfte durch die Gefühlswelten Mozarts lagen bei den Frauen, bei Gabriele Sima als Annio, einem Beispiel herangereifter Mozart-Kultur, vor allem aber bei Ann Murray als Sesto, dem Star des Abends: Wie sie in der Arie «Parto, ma tu ben mio» im ersten Akt der zartesten Bindung und Kraft des Ausdrucks die sicherste Beweglichkeit in den Koloraturen folgen ließ, war beispielhaft und rechtfertigte den ersten großen Szenenapplaus. Nicht ganz auf der Höhe früherer Begegnungen fanden wir dagegen Roberta Alexander als Vitellia; im großen Rondo «Non più di fiori» gegen den Schluß wirkte ihre farbenreiche dramatische Stimme doch schon etwas angegriffen. Dénes Gulyás setzte seinen kraftvollen, aber für die Partie des Tito Vespasiano etwas zu schwerfälligen Tenor ein.

Das Personenverzeichnis dieser Inszenierung ist um zwei stumme Figuren bereichert: Während der Ouvertüre tritt Titos fremdländische Geliebte Berenice als Abschiednehmende auf, und auch der durch die Dialoge geisternde Verschwörer Lentulo, den der dem Kaiser zugedachte Dolchstich trifft, wird im Getümmel kurz sichtbar. Damit hat

1991  
Season

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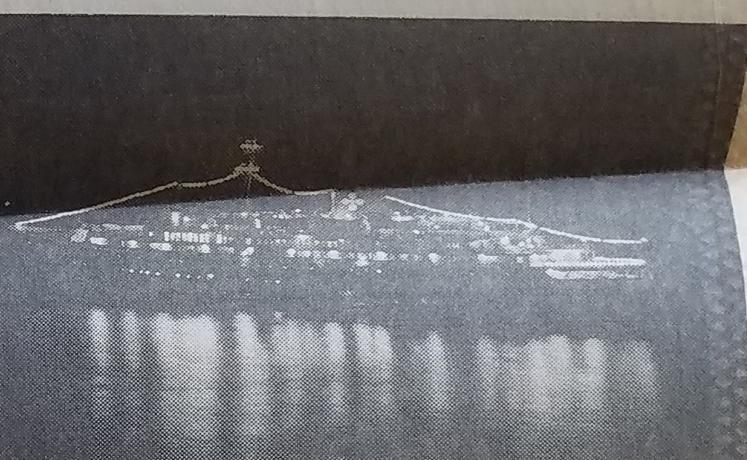
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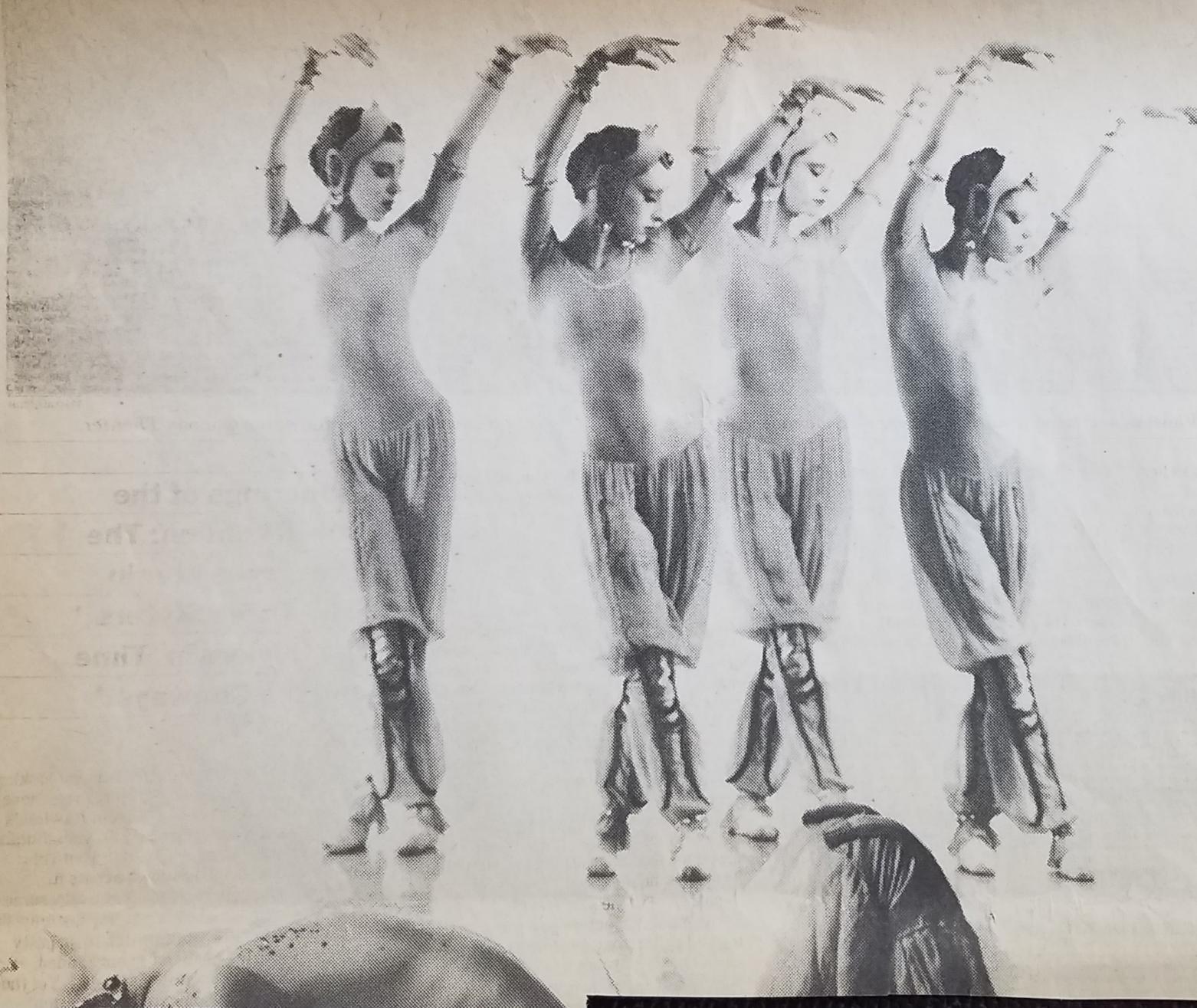
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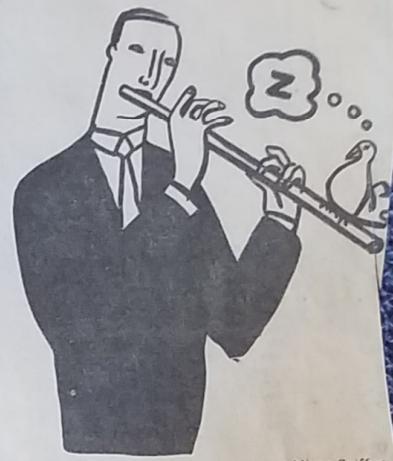
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L E T



Alison Seiffer

## PERFECT PITCH

### Rampant Among Birds

To the Editor:

Will Crutchfield's article about absolute pitch [*"There May Be More to Music Than Meets a Typical Ear,"* Dec. 23] raises the interesting question of the value of absolute pitch perception among musicians. It correctly points out that this remains a complex issue. Does absolute pitch reflect talent or training, and is it musically valuable?

A prior question, however, might be whether the proud possessor of absolute pitch must be human. Readers may be delighted or humbled to discover that the mastery of absolute pitch can be found in songbirds (which have brains weighing a gram or less). It is also more democratically distributed.

My colleagues and I have tested a number of species of songbirds for absolute pitch perception, and found the ability to be rampant. Further, absolute pitch has a clear function in songbirds, aiding in territorial defense and courtship.

As the article states, one of the essential keys to our human musical ability is not absolute but relative pitch perception. And it is here that songbirds seem to falter. When given a choice between absolute and relative pitch perception, they invariably prefer the absolute, regardless of how unmusical it might sound to humans.

JEFFREY CYNX  
Millbrook, N.Y.

The writer is an assistant professor at the Rockefeller University Field Center for Ecology and Ethology.

### Comparing Notes

To the Editor:

Will Crutchfield's excellent essay on absolute pitch omits a description of what a loss of it may entail.

Born into a musical home in Vienna, I became